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THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

GEORGE ADAM SMITH, D.D., LL.D.

FORMERLY MINISTER OF QUEEN'S CROSS FREE CHURCH, ABERDEEN
PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
UNITED FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GLASGOW COLLEGE

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DEDICATION

THESE Sermons, first preached from the pulpit of Queen's Cross Free Church, Aberdeen, I dedicate to my old comrades in her fellowship and ministry, in remembrance of our communion in the service of God, and with lasting affection and gratitude.

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NOTE.

THE words of the Texts of the Sermons and of other citations from Scripture in this volume are taken from the Revised Version of the English Bible (1885), with some slight modifications.

I

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of His grace.—EPHESIANS i. 7.

I WISH to seek with you some of the answers, to be found in the Scriptures and our own experience, to the question: In what does the forgiveness of sins consist? There is another question inseparable from this, and of equal importance with it: How is the forgiveness of sins assured to us? To which the answer is: Through the perfect sacrifice offered once for all in the life and death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We shall carry this answer with us, and before we are done we shall consider what it does to enhance the meaning and obligations of forgiveness. But our main purpose is to ask what that meaning is. We do not aim at a historical survey

or systematic statement of Bible doctrine on the subject. It is only some practical answers we seek —I do not pretend they are exhaustive—from the Bible as well as from our own experience to one of the most urgent questions which that experience presses upon us: In what does the forgiveness of sins consist?

I

The strongest proofs of the need of forgiveness, or, in other words, of the reality of the sense of sin, have been found by some observers in the universality of that sense, or at least in the fact, which the dramatists of all ages have treated as the most certain and tragic element in human experience—the persistence and ineradicableness of a sense of guilt: the hopelessness of outrunning conscience, however successfully some versatile men may have appeared to do so, upon their passions, or upon a strong ambition, or upon the cleaner carriage of an intellectual pursuit, or a busy service of their fellows. Neither the most powerful nor the most pure absorptions, of which the heart is capable, are of themselves sufficient to redeem a man from the conscience of a selfish, a

cruel, or a cowardly deed. I need not linger to remind you of how fully the Bible illustrates and enforces these conclusions of our experience.

But more convincing than this inevitableness of conscience by all men, however hardy and reckless, is the fact that the sense of sin appears most keen and painful in the purest and the truest hearts: that it is the most holy of our race, who have most acutely felt their guilt and need of forgiveness. Which of us can remain unashamed in presence of the shame of the Saints? With that shame also the Bible is red. The verses which burn with it, the Psalms, which are blotted with its tears or broken by its sobs, are to-day and for ever will be, the confessional of humanity. Do not think that it is where the criminal or the murderer breaks down in confession that we will *most* keenly find our conscience. It is the saints upon their knees who draw us beside them; where Isaiah feels his lips unclean before the Throne; where Peter falls at the feet of Christ; where Paul cries crushed and broken from the captivity that is upon him; where John looks us in the face and says: *If any man say that he has no sin he deceiveth himself and the truth is not in him.*

But indeed we do not require to go beyond our own experience. Abstract and pale are the evidences of sin in other men besides those with which each of us can furnish himself. If you and I are awake to-day and if we are dealing honestly with ourselves there is not one of us who cannot find in his own memory and by his own conscience infinitely more painful proofs of the need of forgiveness than the most reckless or the most holy lives of others can possibly present to him. *If any man say that he have no sin he deceiveth himself and the truth is not in him.*

I know that I am speaking to many who are at a stage of life when all this can hardly have the same force as it will when you are older. In our youth religion attracts us more by the ideals and aspirations with which she inspires our strength, than by the remedies and reliefs which she offers to our weakness. But as the years go on it is the sense of the need of forgiveness of which we become most aware. It is an older man who says: *Remember not the sins of my youth, O Lord, nor my transgressions: but according to thy loving kindness remember thou me.* We have missed opportunities, we have neglected duties. What-

ever good use we have made of some of the relations of life, there are others which we have wasted, or to which through selfishness we have been utterly blind. We have not been fully loyal to the hearts that loved and trusted us. We have gone astray in face of manifest warnings from on high. We have sinned against the light and love of God our Father. The years do not lessen nor wear thin this sense of guilt. Rather they bring out all the colour that is in it: red and awful to our eyes. Every additional one teaches us that it is the most inseparable element of human experience, perhaps to be thrown off by nimble youth, but certain to make up on later years. Guilt, a bad conscience, remorse—it is not our theologians but our poets and depictors of human life who have vied with each other in showing how these stick to a man, and how though he carry nothing else out of life with him he carries this. *The sting of death is sin.* "It is like a piece of bad workmanship," one of our greater English novelists makes one of her characters, a carpenter, say: "It's like a piece of bad workmanship, you never, never see the end of it."

Yet the Prophets made it one of their principal

proclamations that God forgave the sins and removed the guilt of the penitent; and Christ went further and announced that the removal of the guilt of men was His work and the meaning of His Life and Death. To earth He came expressly for this; and the confidence with which He promised forgiveness, and with which He bestowed it was not due to His feeling the sense of sin less than its victims do. Christ, the Sinless, felt Sin far more than we, whose hearts condemn us. He brought an unspeakable burden of truth from Heaven; but the burden He found on earth was heavier and it broke His heart. In the misery sin causes, in its damage to our whole nature, in the misunderstanding of God and the estrangement from God which it breeds, He bore our sins more fully than the worst of us or the best of us ever felt them. Yet He proclaimed their forgiveness through Himself. And by Him thousands, nay millions, who had felt the sense of guilt as the most real element of their experience, have come, through Him I say, to be as sure of the greater reality of their pardon and their freedom. They may not have understood all that He did for them—for who can?—but for our pur-

pose it is enough that they knew they were forgiven, and forgiven for His sake.

II

In what then does forgiveness consist? Take, to start with, a most common reading of forgiveness—that it is the recalling of the just punishment of our sins, the abolition by Almighty God of their consequences. Is that true? Is it half the truth? Is it not an answer in which there lies, to say the least, a deal of vagueness and moral confusion? Barabbas might be content with it. It does not express the experience of the saints of the Bible, it is not true to our own highest convictions. In the worst and most servile natures the sense of sin means above all a dread of punishment in its most material form whether here or hereafter; and by such natures forgiveness will therefore be sought and expected as the remission of the material consequences of a man's misdeeds. But penitence of this kind is surely little more than the sorrow of the world which worketh death. In the best and most healthy characters the sense of sin means something very different: not that I am going to be punished and must bear the physical or social

consequences of what I have done; but that I did what I ought not to have done; that I was selfish, cowardly, unready, untrue, and cruel; that I failed at the test and that the failure was my own fault; that it has set me at a distance from God; that it has cost me in my character the loss of liberty and spontaneousness; that it has produced in me a cowardly mistrust of myself in all moral effort; that it has given me a slavish fear of God in place of the natural love and trust which His children enjoy. A man who has such a conscience of his sins will not, in seeking forgiveness, be chiefly concerned about their physical or social consequences. The fear of punishment will be absorbed in, or at least be subordinate to, the nobler anxiety as to how the ethical and religious disturbance produced in his nature by sin may be removed. For him forgiveness will mean reconciliation with God His Father; the dissipation of the evil conscience which rises in him at the presence of God; and the overcoming of that horrible distrust of himself before temptation and before duty which paralyses his will and renders him an easy prey to the powers of evil. At the same time, looking to God as he does, as God Almighty, of infinite grace and with

command of nature and of history as well as of the spiritual life of man, he will not cease to pray for the reduction of even the material consequences of his guilt. But he will not count the latter as the essence or even as the necessary result of his forgiveness. If he does he will be entertaining a conception of forgiveness which will only lead him away from, and blind his heart to, those moral results, by which alone God's pardon of us could be justified or were worth the taking by ourselves.

These truths, which are obvious to the higher instincts of our own nature, are plainly set before us in the Bible. Not without struggle and much passion; for it costs God's people, even under the special guidance of His Spirit which they enjoyed, no little argument, and even scepticism to reach them. The Revelation, of which the Bible is the record, encountered man upon every moral level upon which it has been given to the human heart to suffer and aspire. And therefore the account which the Old Testament contains of how men looked for and sought the Divine Pardon is very various. Yet it is one which steadily grows with Israel's increasing experience of God's

manifestation of Himself and of His Providence in nature and history; throwing off by degrees every element of servile error and fear, till at last it becomes a noble and disinterested peace, in which a man learns to accept the spiritual elements of forgiveness for their own sake—the assurance of God's restored trust in him, the restoration of His communion, and the welcome burden of His will—and reckons as subordinate and incidental to these, such reliefs, as He may be pleased to send, of the outward afflictions which the sins have wrought.

At first—it was a necessary stage in their Divine education—the Hebrews appear to have had a very simple idea of the relations of sin, suffering, and forgiveness. In their language *the Lord brought down upon* a man's *head his own wickedness*[1]; visited him with physical and other evils, and when He forgave him these were removed. The nation as a whole sinned, and in consequence suffered drought and famine, and when these did not avail to produce penitence in them, oppression, slaughter, and even exile at the hands of heathen powers regarded as the instruments of God's

[1] Ju. ix. 5, 7.

righteous anger against them. And His forgiveness was assured to their penitence when He delivered them from their enemies and restored to them their political freedom and the opportunity of worshipping Him in their own land. In all this there was a profound truth: the conviction, namely, that as God is One, so His world is one; that morality to use a modern phrase is "of the natural order of things"; and that the Divine Providence sways nature and history for the high ends of righteousness and grace.

Yet, as we can easily see, the effect of such simple views upon such an experience, was to create and foster the belief that physical and political disaster, whether it fell on the nation or on the individual, always implied the sinfulness of its victims, and that conversely prosperity always proved their righteousness. How strong and pervasive a dogma this became in Israel may be perceived not only from the quantity of the Old Testament prophecy directed against it, but from the bitter struggle and deep passion which it cost the prophets and psalmists to reach an opposite conviction. Both the nation as a whole and certain

great souls in their private experience [1] found themselves in adverse circumstances which their consciences refused to acknowledge as due to their sins. Both beheld their cruel and unjust foes flourishing in prosperity and refused to believe in the righteousness of the fact. In these experiences both encountered at first a great shock to faith in God. And it was this shock and the scepticism it induced, which gradually dissolved the dogma, that suffering and sin, righteousness and prosperity were identical; and when the dogma was dissolved room came for a higher and more spiritual conception of forgiveness than had formerly prevailed. The chastised nation or individual, protesting their innocence, and pressing with passion through the mystery of suffering, which seemed to hide God from them, and to place His decrees in contradiction to their consciences, found Him at last not by breaking beyond the suffering into health and political freedom, but while accepting the suffering itself; and found Him there more real, more near, more full of grace and help, than they had ever known in the brightest days of their prosperity.

[1] Such a Psalmist as the author of Psalm lxxiii.; Jeremiah and the author of the Book of Job.

You can see how such experiences gave to these souls a new and a liberated idea of forgiveness. They could no longer identify it with the removal of physical or political sufferings, but in spite of the continuance of these they were assured of it by spiritual convictions, which they could cherish in all independence of their physical or political fortunes. Forgiveness meant a new relation to God: the experience of His communion and of His inseparableness from them; of His love, and His belief and trust in them. Of course, God being what He was, with power as omnipotent over their physical and political fortunes as over the life of their spirit, they did not give up hoping also for their relief from pain and their visible vindication before the eyes of the world. They prayed that He would *make perfect that which concerned them.* And even within this life He often did so. But so far from imagining that forgiveness was coincident with the removal of the sufferings which their sins had brought upon them, they found that it gave them new strength and willingness to bear these, so long as it should please God to continue to afflict them. They accepted their pain; the power to do so was one of the results of forgiveness. Yet

after this life was over they looked for one which should be full of blessedness and glory. *Nevertheless,* in spite of every suffering and every doubt it breeds, *I am with Thee: Thou hast holden my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory.*

In the New Testament we find the full results of this age-long struggle to light and peace. They are so simple that to describe them requires few words. Only we must first notice that our Lord found it necessary again to contradict the dogma (for it still lingered) that all suffering meant guilt.[1] And again the inference was clear that the forgiveness of sins did not essentially consist in the removal of suffering. Although, in the divine power bestowed on Him, He sometimes healed the sinner when He forgave him, the forgiveness was granted before the healing. In His picture of the penitent prodigal, although the latter is received as a son as he was at the beginning and clothed with the robe and the ring, yet himself had been satisfied, were it his father's will, to be taken back only as a hired servant. For his pure penitence rightly discerned that forgiveness was something essentially

[1] John ix. 3.

different from the full removal of the consequences of his sin. It is not otherwise with the Apostles, who in speaking of God's pardon emphasise the ethical and religious results. Only, and still more brightly and confidently than with the prophets, the New Testament assures those who are forgiven of their full blessedness and freedom in the glory of their Father hereafter. *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more . . . and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

The sum of the matter then is that we cannot say, God *never* remits to a forgiven man the consequences of his sins. He is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who in His Name healed the paralytic at the same time that He said: *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee!* He is the omnipotent Creator who in His physical world has provided such wonderful means of healing, recuperation, and repair. But what we can affirm, both from Scripture and experience, is that such a remission does not always nor even generally occur when forgiveness itself has become sure. To go back for a moment to Scripture and to a most clear example there, we read of David who by God's grace found pardon, if ever man did, and who

nevertheless in his kingdom, in his family and in his own person bore to the day of his death the punishment of the great crime of which he so nobly repented. And we all—or at least those of us who are past our youth—have known men and women who have as nobly repented of their sins as David, and who nevertheless in the unremitting pains of a long life have had to pay the heavy debts they incurred by the folly and recklessness of their youth. Did not Israel of old, although forgiven, *receive of the Lord's hand double for all her sins?*

In all which there is at once a great consolation and a terrible warning. A great consolation—for to those who are compassed with infirmities of their own making, irremovable on this side the grave, there comes the message that within these and in spite of these, the peace of God may be found; that they may bear them not as convicts or guilty slaves, but as sons, and find in them not punishment but purification and the means of holding closer to the God of grace, than ever they had been able to do without them. And a terrible warning —Brethren, *be not deceived,* God is not mocked. *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap.*

Sin, and you may be forgiven, but you shall never so long as life lasts be able to count on freedom from the consequences. Even within the moral sphere these may persist. Sin, and though God's love sweep away the hopelessness of the future, and God's Spirit put in you a new will and new courage, it shall be with heavier weights that you run your race, with increased temptations that you must battle up to the end of the day—temptations besides that you shall never encounter without the shame and weakness of having been yourself their guilty cause.

III

In what then does the forgiveness of sin essentially consist? In the infinite riches of God's grace by Christ Jesus, it consists in many spiritual results, of which I have already, from Scripture and our experience, quoted several. But among these there is one to which we may devote the rest of this sermon for three reasons, because it is ethically the most inspiring, because it is that on which Scripture appears to lay most stress, and because, at the same time, it is one so often overlooked by ourselves.

From at least the time of the prophets up to the end of the New Testament the element in Forgiveness which the Bible most frequently emphasises is God's new trust in the soul He has pardoned: the faith that despite our frailty, our unworthiness, our guilt; despite the mistrust and despair which the memory of our sin induces, God still trusts us, God believes us capable of doing better, God confides to us the interests and responsibilities of His work on earth. That according to the Bible is the ethical meaning of forgiveness—God's belief in us, God's hope for us, God's will to work with us, God's trust to us of services and posts in His kingdom.

So long ago Isaiah found it: when immediately after his guilt had been removed by a sacrament of fire, he felt himself receive—not, mark you, to begin with a definite commission to God's people, but the opportunity, upon his own will and motive, to give himself to the message and work which God proclaimed as open. He had called himself *a man of unclean lips, and dwelling in the midst of an unclean people.* But when his iniquity was taken away and his sin purged; and he heard the voice of the Lord saying *Whom shall*

I send and who will go for us?—he himself in the great consciousness of freedom which forgiveness brought, and in the full enjoyment of God's restored trust in him, cried out: *Here am I, send me!* And at once he received his commission.

So also long ago a Psalmist felt it—the Psalmist who, more than any other, declares to us the purely ethical motives that drive men to pray for Pardon. Forgiveness came to him, too, as the instinct of a great commission from God, who trusted him.

Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips, And my mouth shall show forth thy praise. I will teach transgressors thy ways, And sinners shall be converted unto thee.[1]

So long ago another prophet saw it when he made God's trust of men the starting point of all salvation and providence. *For He said: Surely they are my people: children who cannot lie* or prove false. They did lie, they did fail: all the time they proved rebels to His will and traitors to the trust that He reposed in them. But He forgave them by trusting them again. He said *they*

[1] Psalm li. 13, 14.

are children that will not lie: so He became their saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them and carried them all the days of old.[1] The whole glorious history of their salvation and their long sustenance started from their God's gracious trust in their unworthy and tainted souls.

In the New Testament it is not otherwise. Our Lord's announcements of pardon are sometimes followed by the words: *Go and sin no more.* They are in the imperative mood, but it is the fashion of the grammar of the day. What they mean is—Thou wilt sin no more: I have confidence in thee! When Peter fell by denying His Lord at the critical hour, the assurance of forgiveness came to his heartfelt penitence in the gift of a new commission in His Lord's service. *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him: Feed my lambs,* and again *Tend my sheep,* and again *Feed my sheep.*

Such, then, is the Biblical doctrine of for-

[1] Isaiah lxiii. 8, 9.

giveness. Amid the many blessings in which through the infinite riches of His mercy in Christ, it consists, this stands out, the most wonderful and inspiring essential of all: that God Himself should trust us when we have lost all trust of ourselves: should believe us capable of standing when we have fallen, of overcoming where we have only known defeat; and of again doing the work, in which we have been so lax and unfaithful.

For it is just in all this that the tremendous moral possibilities of forgiveness consist. Let a man merely off the consequences of his sin and by that alone you do not give him much more than room and time to grow better: *though the goodness of God also leadeth to repentance,* and if men's hearts were only more open to the respites and reliefs of His ordinary Providence, they would find in them all the grace, which they are too apt to associate only with the crises of worship and religious feeling. Tell a man in addition that God so loved him that He gave His Son to die for him, and when the man believes it, though his heart was dry and obdurate, you shall indeed have wakened all over his experience—as I dare say nothing else ever did wake in human nature—the springs of

wonder, gratitude and hope. But you cannot make him feel the depths of that love, you cannot carry his gratitude or his hope to their fullest pitch, you cannot add to his affections a new conscience or fortify them past every shock, till you tell him that God's love for him includes God's trust in his loyalty, in his power to make a new start, to stand firm, and, though he should be the most fallen and stunted of men, in his power to grow at last to the full stature of his manhood. Without this trust of God forgiveness is only indulgence and the experience of it becomes a mere escape. But with the sense of being trusted forgiveness becomes a conscience, and puts into a man a new sense of honour to do his best and his bravest for the God who believes in him.

> The fear o' hell's the hangman's whip
> To haud the wretch in order;
> But where ye feel your honour grip,
> Let that ay be your border!

And it is this sense of honour, which forgiveness, when it is felt as God's great trust of him, plants in a man deeper and stronger than any other motive with which religion can ever endow him.

Look you, there is no other view of forgiveness

so lasting or so ethical as this. So ethical: for this makes it no mere absolution, no bare decree of the authority of God—whether direct by the Spirit, or mediated by His priests upon earth; no mere decree of the authority of God, but the constant influence of His grace and His will upon our hearts. In giving forgiveness God gives Himself.

Nor is there any other view of forgiveness so enduring or so bound to grow. For whereas the effect of forgiveness, as so often vulgarly interpreted among us, refers only to the past, and a man's sense of it is confined to a single moment or crisis of experience, however glorious that be; this other sense of forgiveness as God's gracious trust of us, though cherished at first with a faltering faith which often shrinks from the wonder of it and can scarcely believe in its reality—this sense of forgiveness, as God's trust of us, grows with the growth of the common days, finds its proof in each new morning's gift of life, and its illustrations in every fresh opportunity, however commonplace, and every additional task or trial, however dull or painful. I would not say one word against that preaching, which claims our hearts for the grace of God in a single and perfect hour of appreciation,

for by such sudden conversions the lives of many have immediately been changed and shall be to the end of time; but I do know that in the sense of forgiveness, which I have put before you, you will expand the sensations of an hour to the experience of a lifetime and make God's forgiveness of you as wide and as constant as His common Providence.

IV

I said at the outset that we would confine ourselves to the question: In what does the Forgiveness of Sins consist? and would not take up the other equally important one, How is the Forgiveness of Sin procured and assured to us? But as Christians we can never forget the answer to this other, for it is the central fact of our religion: through the love of God, who gave His own Son to die for us on the Cross. And I now conclude, with the bearing of this fact on a further application of the truth we have been studying together.

As it was Christ who brought God's pardon to us, let us remember that God's great trust, so manifest in it, is continued to us so far as we hold to Christ and abide in Him. Apart from the grace, that is so richly every man's in Christ, God cannot

trust us nor could we presume on the assurance of our forgiveness nor prove ourselves worthy of it. Therefore, in this most liberating of all ethical experiences do not let a man ever feel himself independent. But as day by day the goodness of God comes upon him; as he wakens every morning into the wonder of God's patience with his unworthy soul; as the great occasions of life come upon him, work, influence, friendship, love; as knowledge, and progress and a stable character become sure to him—let him remember that these are not given to him for his own sake, but for Christ's. Let him say to himself: I am trusted with them all by God, and assured of them all, only in so far as I live in Christ and by the grace which He bestows.

II

THE WORD OF GOD

The Fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.—PSALM xix. 9.

THESE are bold words to apply to Fear of all things in the world. For among the affections of the human mind none has engendered, whether within or without religion, tempers more base; nor is there any emotion less firm or more quickly thrown off by growing men.

We need not linger on the fear of things that are earthly: fear of men, or of pain, or of poverty, or of death. There is no falsehood or servility, of which the human heart has not been guilty beneath the influence of such anxieties. Where they affect the mind no virtue seems secure. They have even the black magic to change the heart of a virtue into its extreme opposite: corrupting, for instance, the love of liberty for oneself into a merciless tyranny

against others, and dissolving courage into a panic brutality. Witness the French Reign of Terror.

The case is not different when the Fear is that of some god or supernatural influence. The rites and tempers of a religion have generally been unclean in direct proportion to the degree of terror for the deity which the religion inspired. Superstition is nothing but the dominance of an ignorant fear over reason and love; and superstition, as we know even within Christianity, has begotten every form of uncleanness and cruelty. Nor is there any religious emotion to which at first sight the epithet *enduring* is less applicable. Though the beliefs, that God is capricious and arbitrary in His doings, or that He is jealous of the ambition and success of His creatures, have lingered, often under curious disguises, to the present day; they and the false fear they bred were among the earliest to be defied by the conscience and the intellect of men. And the cause of decay in many historical religions was just this: that they sought to rule their votaries by fear alone, and either corrupted the minds of the latter, or by them were found out and thrown away. Even where the Fear of God has more

reasonable grounds, it might be plausibly argued that its moral effects are only temporary, and that the aim of true religion has ever been to replace fear by nobler influences, without which it cannot permanently elevate the character.

On the other hand, it requires little observation or analysis to show, that while there is thus a Fear which is false and perishable, there is another that is true, inevitable, salutary, and enduring. To put it on the lowest, the least moral, grounds: in a universe, where so much is unknown and inscrutable, whether concerning the Supreme Being or our own ultimate fate; where the Powers at work are so awful and we so weak and ignorant; where the best, the most spiritual and delicate, of which we are conscious, appears so often to be frustrated and crushed by sheer force—who among us can escape the discipline of fear? And discipline it is in its power of arresting the mind, purging us of pride and inducing sobriety, vigilance and awe. Nor even when the full light of religion and morality is introduced, and we come to know God better in His Righteousness and Mercy, does it seem possible or even desirable for us to outgrow Fear and replace it by other religious emotions.

For there is always the sense of guilt, which grows as conscience grows and the heart becomes more refined; there is always, and in an increasing degree, the sense of the stupendousness of the moral ideal and obligation; and even when we recognise God as Love, there is the increase of our sensitiveness and responsibilities towards a Being, who deals with us in such Patience and such Grace. And this, too, may be called the Fear of the Lord.

There is, therefore, a salutary and a permanent Fear of God as well as one that is false and perishable.

It would seem as if the writer of our Psalm had such a distinction in his mind. Certainly he enjoyed the opportunity of observing it in view of the heathen religions by which his people were surrounded. These were rank with fear and with the unclean tempers that fear begets. Probably the Psalm was written at a date, when the decay of the Syrian religions was becoming obvious, when one after another of their gods was found ineffective, and the worshippers had grown weary of rites as burdensome and cruel as they were futile. In opposition to such moribund superstitions the

Psalmist boldly says: *The fear of the* LORD—the God of Israel—*is clean and enduring for ever.*

Now the Psalmist makes this claim for his religion in a Psalm which sings the praise of the written forms in which that religion is enforced. *The Law of the Lord is perfect, the testimonies of the Lord are sure, the statutes of the Lord are right, the commandment of the Lord is pure, the judgements* or ordinances *of the Lord are true.* All these are well-known names for the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially for the body of sacred Law which they contain. When among the five terms, each clearly significant of the Scriptures, the Psalmist introduces the abstract expression *the Fear of the Lord;* he must mean something much the same: the Revealed Word of God—but rather in its general character and influence than in its separate precepts and laws. He must mean the awe, the obedience, the discipline and inspiration of the Book whose praise is the burden of his song. The Christian Church has legitimately extended his words to the larger body of Scriptures which forms her Bible. I wish that we should now bring ourselves under this moral power and permanence of our Bible, and

earnestly seek for a little to lay upon our hearts the unique authority which is here claimed for it. *The Fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.*

I do not propose to follow one very obvious way of establishing this claim for the Bible: viz., by showing from the history of the world its divine power of cleansing social life, organising savage communities, rebuking the moral decadence of civilised nations, and holding before mankind the still unexhausted ideals of freedom and virtue. It is true that parts of the Bible have been used throughout all the Christian centuries—used frequently and by all the Churches—to defend the divine right of tyrants, and to sanction the worst forms of intolerance. Yet it would be easy to show that such abuses were due never to the Bible itself, but to misinterpretations, especially of the Old Testament—misinterpretations made in disloyalty to Christ's teaching about the latter in the Sermon on the Mount, and in ignorance of His Spirit. It would be easy to show that such abuses were exceptional, and that in spite of them the Bible has been the charter of the freedom of the peoples of Europe, and the strongest inspiration of their

private and public virtues—for instance, that the more debasing vices, which had been tolerated alike by the philosophers and statesmen of the Roman Empire, were by the influence of the Mosaic Law for the first time rebuked and restrained; and so much restrained that the very names of some of them have disappeared from popular knowledge. One could prove that the Bible built the home and provoked the beginnings of popular education; that it moulded new languages; that it articulated and enforced the efforts of young nations towards independence and their destined work for humanity; that it brought health to art and literature; that it enlightened the ignorant and ennobled the humble; that it gave courage to lonely men to stand alone for truth and justice; and that it endowed the oppressed poor of all the centuries with an energy and a hope of struggle with which nothing else could have inspired them. No history has illustrated this more than our own in Scotland.

But from so tempting a review let us rather turn to a task more urgent in our own day: the attempt to appreciate the moral character of the Bible as a whole; and enforce upon our own hearts and consciences its inspiration and ideals.

I

At the outset we are met by one great difficulty. The keenest criticism, which the Bible has encountered in our day, the strongest doubts of it stirring in men's minds, have reference not to its historical trustworthiness, about which so much is said, but to the moral teaching especially of its earliest portions. We are asked: Are there not present in these the very elements of a false fear of God to which you have just traced so much of the slavishness and impurity of other religions? Are not those chapters of the Book of Genesis, which describe the first growth of human civilisation, somewhat tinged by the fear, that imputes to the Deity a jealousy of the material and intellectual achievements of His creatures? Is the morality enforced upon early Israel not a narrow morality? Are its interests not confined mainly to a nation and to their public duties in war and peace? Is there not wanting in parts a spiritual treatment of the individual and of his rights with God, independent of the nation? Are not practises enjoined, tempers enforced, and laws prescribed which could only be temporary, and which were bound to pass away, as

they did pass away, before higher ideals and a purer dispensation? How then can you say the *fear of the Lord is clean and enduring for ever?*

A number of these charges we are bound to admit to be true—but what then? Obvious as such difficulties are, the solution of them is quite as obvious, and it lies on the pages of Scripture itself.

Let us remember one great fact about Revelation. Revelation when it comes from God to man, has to take man as it finds him. It has to work upon him through the religious ideas and customs which he already possesses. It must use the language, the symbols, and to some extent the intellectual ideas and moral principles by which he already lives. New truths about God have to grow out of the sheaths of old ones, and for a time they must mix with the long-lingering influences of the latter. The moral education of the race can only be a gradual and a slow process. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord Himself has clearly expounded the fact of a progressive revelation under the Old Testament. He rebuked tempers and He abrogated laws, which as He says were permitted to men for the hardness of their

hearts. Thus through Him the Bible itself contains the correction of its rudimentary stages: the enlargement of their ideals: the full purification of all their spirit. But while thus judging the earlier parts of the Bible our Lord equally affirmed that a divine, creative power had been at work in the religion of His people from the very first. And to-day there is not one of the most grudging critics of the Old Testament who is able to deny that, in spite of the low levels from which the religion of Israel had to start, there was present in it from the first a moral purpose and energy which was not present in any of the other religions—the germ and potency of that perfect will of God, which through it was ultimately revealed to man.

Do not let us, therefore, do the Bible the childish injustice of estimating it by things which its spirit finally outgrew: the defeat and outdistancing of which represent its divine victory and triumph. Do not let us condemn the Old Testament for practises and tempers, which its prophets themselves condemn. Let us rather measure the Bible by the unity of ethical purpose which it manifests from first to last, by the completeness with which it leaves behind every trace of a defective morality,

and by the uncompromising and invincible opposition, which the spirit of it offers to every political and religious interest, that insinuates itself as a substitute for the ethical service of God.

II

Let me give some particulars from successive stages of the process.

Take to begin with those tempers and practises of early Israel which some men feel as difficulties in the way of their faith in the Bible. Are we not rather to see in the gradual disappearance of these from the pages of Scriptures the illustration of the omnipotence of God's Spirit, the fulfilment of His claim who said: *Behold I make all things new.*

Or take those later rites and doctrines of religion, which in their proper proportion and at certain historical crises may have been legitimate and necessary, but of which His prophets demanded the abolition, when they were obtruded as substitutes for character and ethical service. For instance, when, in a period of great national prosperity, ritual and sacrifice were elaborated, and the nation laid the emphasis of their trust upon

these, the prophets condemned all ritual, and insisted that justice, purity and love were the only laws which God had given to men. *For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying Hearken unto my voice and I will be your God and ye shall be my people and walk in all the way that I command you.*[1] Or again: *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . But let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream.*[2] Or again: *I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*[3] Or again: *Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me: new moons and sabbaths, calling of assemblies I cannot away with. Wash you, make you clean, cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, champion the fatherless, plead for the widows.*[4] Or again: *Is this the fast I have chosen?—a day for a man to afflict his soul? . . . Is not this* rather *the fast I have chosen?—to loose the bands*

[1] Jeremiah vii. 22 f.
[2] Amos v. 24 f.
[3] Hosea vi. 6.
[4] Isaiah i. 13-17.

of wickedness, to undo the locks of the yoke, to deal thy bread to the hungry and that thou bring the poor into thy house. . . .[1] Or again: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?*[2] Here is morality to the uttermost: righteousness so single, so strenuous, and so victorious over every national interest and religious requirement that its purity and eternal validity are past all question.

Or again, when the nation, founding upon this absolute demand for righteousness, and upon the promise of rewards by which it was accompanied, constructed the dogma that righteousness was always followed by prosperity and that, conversely, suffering must be the proof of guilt, God inspired men to show that righteousness must be pursued for its own sake alone, apart from all rewards and in spite of adversity and pain. By Jeremiah and the author of the Book of Job, every literary acid—irony, satire, scepticism in its most bitter form—along with the more powerful solvents of the disappointments and adversities of life, are employed

[1] Isaiah lviii. 5-7. [2] Micah vi. 8.

to eat out from the mind of Israel this dogma of the essential union of righteousness and prosperity; till we find left alone, naked, trembling, and astonished at its own birth, the faith that a good conscience is independent of every other aid; and that each experience of pain, of doubt and of forsakenness, which besets it, is the means whereby it is brought to purer and more disinterested convictions of its duty and its strength. *Though He slay me yet will I trust Him.*

All this is even more evident in the New Testament. Throughout it there is no aspiration after either political or ecclesiastical empire. *Our aim,* says the Apostle, *is to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. For this is the will of God even your sanctification. The kingdom of God is peace, joy and righteousness in the Holy Ghost. Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness.* Never, either by Jesus or by His evangelists, was a word spoken which could burden or distract the soul in its straight fulfilment of the command: *Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.*

So, then, the ethical aim of the Bible lies before us, in spite of all embarrassments, single, strenuous,

undeviating, supreme. Every one of us has within him its echo, its proof, its other self. For in the earlier stages of his moral growth a man's ideals are necessarily narrow; his vision of the scope and height of ethical obligation is circumscribed. But whether with the narrower ideals or afterwards with the wider, whether with a dim intelligence of duty or with a full and vivid one, his conscience always lifts him to the ideal and drives him forward to the duty; commanding him to moral effort for its own sake and irrespective of whether he thereby fulfil, or fail in, other desires and ambitions. At the first, I say, his conscience may have a narrow sphere and little light. But in the moral intention it never falters nor is ambiguous; and, being followed, it leads a man towards the infinite field and towards the perfect light. In all these respects God's written Word is at one with the Revelation He utters within us. Its divine purity and unchangeable sovereignty are as little to be doubted as those of conscience itself. Nothing can be imagined more reliable, more certain never to fail, more certain to fulfil its promises and lead us to the full knowledge of God's will. It is *clean, enduring for ever.*

III

Now as to the source of this morality, and the authority of it, we are left in no doubt. As our text says, it is *the Fear of the Lord:* something personal in its source, authority and means of enforcement. Nor is it the prostration of the mind before the unknown and inscrutable power of the Almighty; although, as I have said, this also has its place in the religious experience of man. Still less is it obedience to God's arbitrary decrees. It is much rather the reverence, the awe and the impulse to imitation, which are stirred in a soul by the revelation of the Character of God. It has been justly said that the "ultimate foundation of all morality lies in our knowledge of the Divine Being" (Mary Wollstonecraft); and no words could better describe the origin and reason of the morality enforced by the Bible. Every rise in Israel towards the full vision of duty, every higher moral ideal, every *new commandment,* started from some fresh revelation of God Himself. It was because they saw God *exalted in righteousness* that the prophets proclaimed the absolute morality of which we have been speaking. It was because God

had so loved Israel, redeemed them, spared them, guided them through the wilderness, and given them freedom and a stage for their history, that the Book of Deuteronomy moves them to love for one another, to kindness for the poor and the slave, and to humanity towards animals. And it was again because God had redeemed them, and in His grace furnished their unworthy life with His Light and Truth, that the great Evangelist of the Exile laid upon the people that obligation of service to humanity; which still remains the ideal of individuals as well as nations. *Be ye holy for I am holy. Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect. We love Him,* and one another, *because He first loved us. One is your Father and ye are brethren.* Such are the keynotes of the moral preaching of the Bible; throughout its morality is *the Fear of the Lord* Himself.

IV

Now the source and character of that morality being what it is, it follows that the means by which it is enforced throughout the Bible are not the instruments of mere force and wonder, always more or less irrelevant in moral teaching, but the declara-

tion of the truth itself, the revelation of the Supreme Being in whose character and actions it is embodied, and the conviction—strong against all experience to the contrary—that since it is His will and purpose, it cannot fail to be realised in the world.

Thus the Book of Deuteronomy (chap. xiii.) expressly warns Israel that miracles, though they happen as genuine signs of Divine Power, can never be a test between the false and the true prophet. The ultimate test, it says, must lie in the character of the prophet's message, and the revelation which he makes of God. In conformity with that the great prophets of the Old Testament accompany none of the prophecies I have quoted with the performance of miracles, but lay the truths of these in their independent weight upon the minds and consciences of their people. Our Lord employed wonderful deeds to illustrate the power and benevolence of the Most High, but He rebuked the people for being content with the unstable wonder which miracles exerted, and in one parable after another He explained that the efficacy of God's Word lay in its own inherent potency and in the preparedness of men's hearts to receive it.

It was seed cast into the ground: it was a pearl of great price which when a man saw, he straightway would sell all that he had in order to buy it: it was found treasure, flashing from the dust of common life its own beauty and richness: it was leaven working by its native force: it was light that required neither argument to prove nor herald to proclaim it. Again, when one wakened in torment said of his five brethren: *if one go to them from the dead they will repent,* the reply was *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.*[1] Hence the reiteration of the simple letter of our Lord's teaching with a plainness which some have called commonplace. It is not commonplace. It is moral truth offering itself upon its own evidence to the conscience of man; travelling in the greatness of its strength. By itself it was bound to do everything. The miracle of miracles is the simple, unaided Word of God. *It shall not return unto Me void: but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

[1] Luke xvi. 30, 31.

V

Yet all this is only to present morality as education, and the experience of every man is the proof of how one-sided a view that is of our moral life. We do not only grow from one ideal to another. We have to struggle. Every man stands between two worlds, each of which claims him for its own, and the life of his spirit in order to grow must be a constant warfare for the interests of the one against the forces of the other. How vividly does the Bible represent this for every figure which crosses its pages! From the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane; from the temptation before the tree of knowledge to the temptations in the wilderness: with Adam and Abraham, with Jacob and Joseph, with Saul and David, with Solomon and Ahab and Gehazi, with Peter and Judas, with Paul and Demas—with one and all it is the same. They stand between two worlds and are conscript to their eternal warfare. This is the universal lot of humanity, and to this, if my conscience has fallen asleep to the fact that it is my lot also, the Bible moves me again with the Word of God: at one with conscience but far stronger

and more explicit. A great sceptic has said: that if anything could prove the Book to be the Word of God, it is this way it has of aiding conscience in opening our eyes to the two possibilities which lie before us and in bidding us make our choice for eternity. Here is fear in the noblest sense of the word: fear that *is clean and enduring for ever.*

But if the Bible thus be at one with conscience in revealing the two worlds between which we stand, how thoroughly is it at one with experience in revealing to us ourselves—us who have to make that eternal choice. With a penetration and a truthfulness, attempted by no other book, it uncovers the secrets of the human heart. Scripture gives my conscience new eyes to see me; new lips to condemn me; new ears to catch those voices of truth which murmur in my mind what I really am. Obliged to that moral warfare to which all are conscript, how helpless I stand in face of it. How deep the Word of God casts a man! How weak it leaves him!

Is there one of us who does not tremble when on the one side there are put before him the momentous issues that open through God's Word; and upon the other, he realises, as only God's Word can make

him realise, that he—his mind, his heart, his will, are the poor things which have to work out the victory!

VI

But the Bible goes further than these obvious elements of morality—and among all the constituents of a clean and a permanent religious fear with which it endows us this is surely the most sanctifying as it is the most awful—the Word of God, I say, goes further and tells us that the effort, the agony, nay the very shame and curse of man's moral warfare are shared and borne by God Himself.

The Fear of the Lord, the Fear of the Lord, descending from the very Person and Character of the Most High, is not according to the Bible the fear only of a God of infinite Holiness: the awful King and Judge of the creatures of His hand. God is revealed in the Bible not as regnant and judicial righteousness alone; but as righteousness militant and suffering at our side: for us men and for our salvation descending from on high: entering human griefs and carrying human sorrows: setting men's sins not only in the light of His

countenance but upon His heart: and making His own the agony and the travail of all their ethical struggles.

You know in how many human similitudes the prophets brought that home to the heart of Israel. A nation, which believed itself forbidden to make any image of the Deity after any mortal likeness, was bidden also to conceive Him with the features of human effort and pain: as a Warrior sharing His people's battles; as a Father bearing their griefs: and in one extreme figure as a Mother travailing in her pangs for their new birth and restoration. *In all their afflictions He was afflicted: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them;* but His love was not only pity. It was fellow-suffering; and beyond that an agony for their holiness, whose depth and height they could not comprehend; which was therefore endured for them, and by entering into which by faith they were lifted, purified and redeemed.

These are the real Old Testament prophecies of the Incarnation: God manifest in the flesh, entering our moral warfare, in our weakness, at our side, tempted in all points as we are, making the shame of our sin and the misery of our estrange-

ment from God His burden, and at the last, as St. Peter says, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree.

It is in that, in all that wonderful story of the suffering and sacrificial Love of God, which culminates on the Cross of Christ, that we feel, so far as with human hearts we may, the length and the depth of the fear of the Lord. This Fear is not merely the infiniteness of the moral ideal which lies before us all, and not merely the knowledge of our own incapacity in face of it, but the faith that the Warfare is God's as well, that our sins, as Hosea saw long ago, cost the Divine Nature more pain than anger, and that His Love reaches the victory for us, only through agony, shame, and all the self-sacrifice of which Perfect Love alone is capable.

The Story of this Divine Passion, which means both our condemnation, who have made it necessary by our sins, and our salvation, if we feel the penitence which it inspires as nothing else can, is found in these pages and in these alone. Hence, and hence only, their divine validity. Not their inerrancy; not that they answer to this or that theory of inspiration; but that independent of all

theories, whether old or new, they tell to men the story of the travailing and suffering Love of God: the one Passion, the one Victory in all the history of time which can never grow old, nor lose its indispensable force for the sinful hearts of God's children; *clean and enduring for ever;* needing nothing, as Love needs nothing, of external authority or argument, to prove itself to the heart that requires it.

So then, beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God, God Himself, *who worketh in you.*

III

TEMPTATION

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.—MATTHEW iv. 1.

TEMPTATION is the one certainty—the one immediate certainty before us all. It is an experience so inevitable and so near, that we must welcome every sympathy and every aid one can find beneath its mysterious onset. Let us now learn what One felt it to be, who *was in all points tempted as we are,* and what it meant for Him. I do not intend to go into the details of the three forms of temptation recorded in this chapter. Let us abide by the first verse of the story and consider the general elements of Temptation which that describes.

In Temptation, it tells us, there are these three factors: God, the Power of Evil, and the Tempted Man himself.

I

The first of these is God. I suppose that looking at Temptation in the abstract this is easily acknowledged. It is indeed asserted in many passages of God's word. And yet in the concrete experience, in the very grip and breath of the temptation itself, this is the hardest thing of all to believe. We are rushed and blinded. The heart feels left to itself and terribly forsaken. Then *was Jesus led up into the wilderness—to be tempted.* Universal as temptation is, we go into it as we go into death, each of us for himself and absolutely alone. And, in this, temptation is even worse than death. For in the awful hollow and vacancy of dying there is—as our predecessors there have told us—often the greater room for God; and the religious instincts, freed from all embarrassments of the world, can hold the more closely to Him. But in temptation they are paralysed. The touch of evil on the soul does what the claw of the tiger was fabled to do upon the body. It deadens every nerve except the one it tears. A besetting sin, a strong passion will suck the reality out of all else: out of love and truth and honour

and God. And something of this is felt in the very beginnings of temptation. Like our Lord we draw into the wilderness. The grass and the flowers cease, faces cease, comradeship and sympathy are gone. God himself seems gone, and we are *alone with wild beasts.*

Ah, how easy it is to fight other battles, which bring their own courage with them! In the strife for college prizes, in the strife for daily bread, in the struggle after truth, in man's war with nature, in the effort and rivalry of debate—the air is full of enthusiasm. But on this dark field without touch of the ranks shoulder to shoulder, without the sound of the trumpet, too often without the sight or sympathy of any comrade, the soul passes to its battle alone, and sometimes as if forsaken of God Himself.

Now the first rally, which it is possible to sound to our hearts under this awful loneliness of temptation, is that which is also the first to be sounded under those other solitudes, which await us all, of pain and death. In pain and death the first thought which steadies us, and makes peace for further thinking, is that they are universal and parts of the appointed order of things. Well—

Temptation, too, is a bit of the destiny of man. Suddenly though the assault surge upon him, it is no accident. Solitary as he feels in his battle, he does not in fact fight alone. He is one of an innumerable army of warriors, and if for a little he will give play to his imagination, what an army it will appear. On that field no living soul is idle, or left to itself without orders, without a trust, without a pledge. Every one with his own temptation; every human figure interesting, pathetic and stimulating to look upon. Some may be blind, some in panic, some forlorn. But there are a nobler multitude. If God be hidden, they cling the more tightly to His bare word; if they sometimes feel He has left them alone, they cherish with the more passion—and by just the measure of the distance to which He seems removed—the conviction that He has trusted them to be alone. Think of the dim multitudes who are fighting temptations more grinding and persistent with far feebler strength than yours. Think, for such are still left in the world, of those who prefer a life of exhausting poverty to daily opportunities of compromising with honesty or selling their purity for gold. Individualise them, my brothers,

individualise them; and you will find a conscience and a rally in every one of them. Think of the men, and they can be found in every city, who when the law had freed them from all obligation to pay their creditors, have as fortune came back to them used her favours to pay every one of their former debts, though it means a life of hard labour instead of one of comfort and ease. Think of the women, you will find them, too, in every great city, who are battling for themselves and their children on a few shillings a week against temptations that say, Yield to us and we can give you food and clothing enough for them and you. Holding out! What starved garrison, that marched from its inviolate fortress with all the honours of war and to the admiration of its foes, ever deserved half the glory or for our hearts was charged with half the inspiration, which thousands of tempted souls deserve and can afford to us, who hold the fortresses of their lonely lives against the devils of dishonesty and greed and lust. And yet you have strong men whining to-day all the world over—and some of them parading their whines in literature—that the temptations of their strength are too great for them; and slipping off

into the pleasant mire with the cry, I cannot help it. What forgetfulness! What cowardice!

Have you ever watched the sense of what I have tried to present to your imagination, dawning in the epistles of St. Paul? No man felt the loneliness of temptation more than he; none has sent wilder cries out of the despair of that hour when evil shuts us in, and God and His fair worlds are blotted out as with a mist. Yet how does Paul recover himself? By remembering that *no temptation can overtake him except such as is common to man*[1]; by obeying his own call, *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*[2]; by imagining life as a race-course and every man that striveth for the mastery with his eye on the goal; by seeing life as a war, and his brothers everywhere putting on their armour.

It is such visions, which rally men's hearts under the paralysis that comes by dwelling upon the mystery and loneliness of their own temptations. They hear the noise of war about them. Through the chaos of human life they see a line of battle set. They feel shoulder to shoulder with thou-

[1] 1 Corinth. x. 13. [2] Phil. ii. 4.

sands of brave men. The rhythm and pageantry of a great army fill what a moment before they thought to be a wilderness. And in their heart there springs a strong feeling of sympathy and loyalty: a feeling of honour to do their best and bravest by the side of their unfaltering comrades in the war. If I do otherwise *behold, I deal treacherously with the generation of God's children.*[1]

Yet there is more behind. It is through this touch with our fellow men, that like the Psalmist whom I have quoted, we reach a sense of God. By the sight of that universal war, by the thrill of those steadfast ranks we come to feel that they and we have been destined, called, charged by the Power which knows and orders all. More exquisite still we know that we have been trusted. God Himself has placed us at this post of danger, not only with the command to overcome, but with all that the bare imperative opens from the heart of it to the eye of faith: creative moral power, and His belief in us that we will use that moral power and stand true to our duty. For *God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain*

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 15.

salvation—salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.[1]

Now see how all this general belief is heightened and enforced upon us by the sight of Jesus Himself in our battle. That even He did not escape the strife, how infinitely more sacred must it make our own position there. That He felt the awful difficulty of doing the Father's will; that even to Him life was temptation, and temptation reached the rigour of agony—how much that means to us. In that base despair, in that coward's and deserter's feeling which so often besets our hearts—that nobody could be expected to stand the contest, that it is our helpless fate to yield—what a new conscience, what a new sense of power it is to see that He also took post and station on the field and held them till the foe was routed. By this we know we have not been sent like Uriah into the hottest of the battle to be slain. We take Temptation not as the curse of our individual wills, too worthless for a higher fate, but as the debt and obligation of our manhood glorified in Him.

[1] 1 Thessal. v. 9.

"Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time.
Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray,
'Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!'
Yea, but O Thou whose servants are the brave
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise."

II

But, again, though led by the Spirit into the wilderness Jesus was led up to be tempted of the Devil.

It may relieve some minds, if we tell ourselves with regard to this that it is not necessary to believe in the bodily appearance of Satan to our Lord. Indeed our belief in such is largely due to the impression on our imaginations of the efforts of painting and poetry to reproduce this scene, and is in no wise required by the narrative itself. Yet we must not allow such needful reminders to weaken our appreciation of the power which Jesus encountered in His loneliness. To Jesus evil was a force and an intention outside of man, though it had its allies within him. It was

a power bigger than man himself could breed; which hungered for the souls of men and could finally have them for its own with the same absoluteness as He the Son of God and Saviour of the World longed to make them His. *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat.*[1] And Jesus said this from His own experience of the subtilty and covetousness of evil. In the earthly life of our Lord there are no moments so intense as those in which He felt the attempts of evil upon Himself. And it was out of this horror, that in spite of all His illustrations of the necessity and divine uses of temptation, He bade His disciples pray not to be led into it.

Yes, brothers, Temptation however much employed in the Divine Providence is not only from God; not only an examination set by the Great Master to His pupils: a problem and exercise in morals. It is a real encounter with a real foe: not a mere athletic proposed for our health and the development of our souls, but a downright battle for life, with a strong and inexorable a foe. Take away the reality of the warfare

[1] Luke xxii. 31.

that is in it, and you take away even its uses as a discipline; for you rob it of its truth. The men of to-day are too much given to the persuasion that evil is *only* an instructor in life, and a hard trainer: that temptation especially in certain forms is nothing but the opportunity to think more widely, feel more deeply, live more richly. In opposition to that subtle idea, which has slain characters from the beginning, Christ Jesus tells us that evil is indeed something we cannot help encountering, but something which we must encounter as a very foe; coming to close quarters with it as with a power which seeks us out and out for itself; and which, if we yield to it in any of its first and specious demands, is only the more able thereby to make us its own. Let us understand this. It is not safe to enter any temptation without such a conviction. These things we meet so carelessly, thinking that at the worst they can leave but a stain on our honour, a smudge on our imagination, a little weakness on our will, which time can heal; or those other things we enter proudly telling ourselves they are only for our use, experiences we can exploit to enrich our knowledge, or to train our will—in every one of them Christ tells us there lies

a power sufficient to ruin our character, there lurks a foe seeking nothing less than our life.

I know nothing more full of warning than to watch how such a carelessness or pride in denying reality to evil, is gradually found out, and punished by a most bitter and intense conviction of the reality, won through the experience of servitude to it. He who begins by saying evil is not a reality or at least not more than what I can turn to my own advantage, and on these grounds yields to its temptation, is through that very yielding drawn to feel the reality which he has denied to it—and drawn often in a most vigorous and thorough fashion. For we all know the despair which successive submissions to temptation fasten upon the soul; and how, yielding to sin, men fall into a state of mind in which evil not only feels real and powerful but indeed more real than anything else: the only possibility for them, the only thing with any reality left in it. One who had fallen very far into sin wrote thus of it

> "They say that poisoned-sprinkled flowers
> Are sweeter in perfume,
> Than when untouched by deadly dew
> They glowed in early bloom.

"They say that men condemned to die
Have quaffed the sweetened wine
With higher relish than the juice
Of the untampered vine.

"And I believe the devil's voice
Sinks deeper in our ear
Than any whisper sent from Heaven,
However sweet and clear."

III

We have looked at two of the agents in Temptation: God and the power of evil. But there is a third: the tempted man himself. I do not mean that there are three personages in the drama; of whom God and the devil set the problem, and man has got to solve it. But I mean that all three have the setting of the problem: that man himself, has in his own degree, the determining of his temptation; that to, what may be deliberately called, an awful extent each of us is his own tempter.

We see this very plainly even in the case of our Lord, but not so much in what His temptations were as in what they were not. Our Lord's temptations were very evidently His own, not only arising out of His calling and endowment as the Messiah of God, but determined in the form they took by the very

faithfulness with which He has pursued that calling. They were conditioned by His consciousness of His powers, and were planned by the Tempter to meet the purpose to which He had devoted these.

But see also what they did not include, and how much they left out. Remember that these three experiences in the wilderness were not isolated moments of temptation, but typical of the whole process of temptation to which our Lord was subjected up to His final victory in Gethsemane, up to His final patience on the cross: the temptation to be rid of the famine and pain to which He was subject as having taken our flesh; the temptation, pressed upon Him by the Jews and by even His own disciples to use the powers of this world in prevailing with men; and the temptation to rely altogether on the miraculous powers with which He was endowed. Yet summary and inclusive of all our Lord's experience as these three forms of temptation were, do they include all kinds of temptation which are rife among men, and even among the best of men? By no means. It is true that we are told that our Lord was tempted *in all points like as we are.* Yet a little consideration must show us that the words, *in all points,*

are to be interpreted not of the different shapes which Temptation has assumed to the desires of men but of the different rigors of pain and loneliness which the human heart is appointed to suffer under Temptation. And, indeed, the text I have quoted in its addition *yet without sin* itself shows that from certain of the moral struggles, to which by our sinfulness we are subject, our Lord was free. No temptations pursued Him which were penal, or due to the consequences of previous indulgence. And, apart from this, it is simply impossible for us to think of our Lord as constrained by the ignobler shapes of temptation which harass other men and are even recorded in the experience of the saints: temptations for example that proceed from a love of money for its own sake or the baser passions. Christ Himself, it is clear, made many temptations impossible for Him and determined the character of those which actually beset Him.

To some extent, we also have that Power. It is inevitable that Temptations come, but every one of us has it largely within his will to say what his temptations shall be: to determine by his conduct of to-day what form the temptations of to-morrow shall assume. Every stage of our life sets the

problems of the stage which follows it, and our behaviour in youth settles how much our manhood is to be harassed and distracted from the duties which await it.

For temptations, broadly speaking, are of two kinds. They may as I have hinted be little short of penal; pursuing us from our past, the results of old indulgences, and never coming upon us but with that added force to them, and weakness to us, which springs from the recollection of our former defeats by them. Or like Christ's they may be not punishments but discoveries, opportunities and tests: the vision to us of our greatness, that two worlds are in contest for our souls; the proof that we are trusted and called of God; the obligation to some higher task; the signals of a growing and a destined nature.

And each of us has it in his power to determine at least in what proportion these two kinds of temptation will be mingled in his experience.

I speak frankly to young men. You have now the temptations of your manhood in your own power. Manhood is coming to you with its discovery of destiny and a vocation; with its clear issues and responsibilities; with its summons to a

warfare, beyond that of your own character, in the great crusades of Christ. To-day you have it in your power to determine whether you will meet these crises with the full resources of your nature: whether these great issues will come to you as they came to Jesus, with no shame to fill your heart, no terror, no recollection of former betrayals on your part, and no irredeemable compromises with the world; or whether you must face them distracted, hampered and abashed by the self-indulgence or the meanness of the years through which you now move.

Aim to keep yourselves, as He did through the years of His obscurity, in obedience, meekness and prayer; and life for you will be ever opening to nobler and still nobler issues. Trials will come to you not less rigorous and not less painful, but they will always be clean, honourable and bracing. Though you will not feel the power of evil less you must feel the presence of God more. The sense of danger will yield to that of responsibility, honour take the place of fear, and the horror of forsakenness magically change to the faith of being trusted and called. There will always be indeed that feeling of loneliness, which inseparable from the narrow ways of decision, where men must

walk one by one. But it will be a loneliness, loud as Christ's wilderness was with the Word of God, and you will know the meaning of that wonderful phrase *the fellowship of His sufferings.* St. Paul puts this *after,* and not before, the knowledge of the power of His resurrection: *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.*[1] For he means the temptations which come to a soul who has diligently, in the power of its Lord, sought the things that are above, and lived by faith, obedience and aspiration. To such a soul temptation must be suffering still, and, if God wills it, agony, as it was to Christ till the very end. But it shall be the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, a temptation though with pain yet with power: unmixed with shame or fear; but full of resource and the sense of trust; and as certain as Christ's of victory.

Keep near Him and your temptations will be of such a sort. You will be able to take them as signs not that evil is hunting you down, but that God Himself is calling you on; and that Christ is by your side, your unfailing brother and comrade.

[1] Philippians iii. 10.

IV

OUR LORD'S EXAMPLE IN PRAYER

And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, that, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples.—LUKE xi. 1.

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON once observed that "to reason philosophically on the nature of Prayer was very unprofitable." He may have meant that Prayer is so practical —at once so obvious a need, so sensible a relief, and so proved an instrument—that any reasoned defence of it is unnecessary. More probably he was expressing the conviction, that if a man feel no instinct, no inner urgency to pray, mere argument shall never draw him near it. After all there is but one external attraction to Prayer; and that is example. Where the wisest may fail to argue us into the practice of it, the sight of a

wise and a strong man upon his knees starts in us some impulse to learn his secret, and may in the end draw us down by his side.

Now, thank God, the high places of our national history bear many such examples. Put aside priests, ministers, all whose professional duty it is to lead their fellows in prayer, and take men of action, business and affairs. Take men of the world, in the best sense of the word, like Sir Walter Scott; heroes of literature like Scott and Johnson himself; men of research like Clerk Maxwell or Faraday; statesmen like Lincoln or Gladstone; or soldiers like Gordon and that group of soldiers and rulers, whom India trained to greatness in the early years of our late Queen's reign[1]: Conolly and Stoddart, the martyrs of Bokhara, the Lawrences, Edwardes, Havelock and many another: all of them men whom constant duty and much experience of danger had taught to be very jealous in their choice of the weapons of life. That they believed in prayer and used it, means that they had the secret of making it play a strong part in

[1] The lives of many of these will be found in a book, which is too little used by, or for, the youth of this generation—Sir John Kaye's *Lives of Indian Officers*.

their sincere and strenuous lives. To them prayer was real, practical, indispensable; and their example, I repeat, at least prompts us to ask how they found it so; and what was their secret?

I believe that we shall learn that secret best by seeking where they sought it; in the life of Christ Himself. In His case also, as our text tells us, it was example which told: *It came to pass, as He was praying, that one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord teach us to pray.* Let us look then at the Example of our Lord in Prayer.

We shall see that this consisted mainly in three phases of His practice of prayer; one of which gives us the underlying reason and motive of prayer, that God is our Father; and the other two the practical meaning of prayer: that it is, on one side the real moral battle of life, and on the other the renewed enlistment and consecration of our wills to that warfare.

But before we take up these three aspects of our Lord's example, we ought to remember that we have one motive and duty in Prayer in which our Lord cannot be our example. He who included all men under sin, and taught them to pray, confessing

their guilt and beseeching pardon, never for Himself used the language of confession. Christ felt the burden of sin as neither the best nor the worst of us ever felt it, but this was the sin of the world and not His own. Which of us, however, needs an example here? If we are alive and awake and dealing honestly with ourselves, there is not one of us, but day by day must feel himself bowed to his knees before God with the conscience of his guilt, and the need to pray for pardon. *If any man say that he has no sin he deceiveth himself and the truth is not in him.*

I

The first point of our Lord's Example in Prayer is that He based all Prayer on the Fatherhood of God.

The Gospels give us many of the prayers of Jesus; and I think I am right when I say that there is not one which fails to address God as the Father. Again, when He gave His disciples the Model Prayer He taught them to begin by saying, *Our Father which art in Heaven;* and when He strove to show them what Prayer is, He drew His illustrations from earthly fathers and children. So

with His Apostle Paul, who *bowed his knees unto the Father, of whom every family in Heaven and earth is named*;[1] and to whom the Spirit of Prayer *which Himself maketh intercession for us* was *the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba Father.*[2] And so with John, for when he writes the following words of prayer to God, it is after he has set God before us as the Father: *And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will he heareth us.*[3]

In this very simple and obvious reason for prayer we find our answer to all the intellectual objections which are usually brought against it. You know the fashion of them. One has heard them from secularist platforms, from philosophic writings, or oftener, I dare to say, rising as questions from the restlessness of our own minds. Such as—What is the use of telling One, who knoweth all things, what He knows already? What is the use of laying before the All Merciful, who must have anticipated them, our needs and our troubles? What is the use of seeking to change

[1] Ephesians iii. 14. [2] Romans viii. 26, 15.
[3] 1 John v. 14.

the will and purpose of the Most Wise? And so forth. I need not multiply instances, for our own hearts, as I say, frequently suggest them with a cogency, no other's voice can imitate. Well, all such objections to Prayer are at once met, overthrown and dissipated by the faith that God is our Father. For (as Christ has shown in the chapter from which our text is taken) just as natural as it is for our children to come to us with their wants, their troubles and their tasks, with their plans and hopes, with their wonder and perplexities; so natural is it for us to pour out our hearts to the Father of our spirits with the full tale of all we suffer, hope and dare. Prayer is not the effort to tell our God what He must know already. Prayer is not the presumption that He does not feel for us far more than even we feel for ourselves. Prayer is not the attempt to change His wise and loving will. On the contrary, Prayer is the unburdening of our heavy hearts where we know they have been fully anticipated by the yearnings of an infinite compassion; the laying of our perplexities towards a Light which we know must arise upon them, and till it comes, will send peace that they may be borne; the lifting of our sin to a Love, which we

know seeks to pardon us, and whose pardon is therefore our most just, as it is our most eager, hope; the struggle of our will to be one with His will and of our mind to enter into His mind. That is Prayer—not the asking of our own way but of His. Prayer is penitence, confession, aspiration, resignation; the converse of our hearts with the Father; the discipline of our wills to His will; the sincere and strenuous approach of our minds to the mysteries of His. Nothing can keep us back from it, or shed a doubt upon its reality, if we believe that we are His children and He our Father.

And if Prayer be thus the fatherward attitude of the heart, we understand what Paul meant when he said, *Pray without ceasing*. For not only where no word is uttered, but even where thought is not articulate and there is no direct consciousness of His presence—nay (we may dare to say) even where the heart is not sure of Him and errors blind it; if only we live our lives in patience, if we hold them to duty, if we lay them open to truth and are vigilant against evil, we may make them one long unceasing prayer. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the*

kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.[1]

All this is simple and obvious. But the other two sides of our Lord's example in Prayer are not so generally noticed or appreciated by us.

II

Besides interpreting Prayer as the approach to the Father, Jesus made it the real battle of life. I do not mean the mere preparation or discipline for the battle,[2] but the battlefield and the battle itself.

Perhaps we shall best appreciate this use of Prayer by our Lord if we put to ourselves the following question. In our Lord's life on earth, what were the quietest moments, and on the other hand what were the moments most full of effort, trouble and strife?

The first answer, I suppose, to occur to most of us, would be that the quietest moments of our Lord's life on earth were those which He spent alone in communion with His Father in Heaven; and the moments most full of strife and trouble

[1] Matt. vii. 21.

[2] As, for instance, the Salvation Army call Prayer, Knee-Drill.

were those He spent in the exhausting work of healing the sick bodies and minds of the multitude—of one of which He said *Virtue is gone out of me;* in the heavy task of lifting His dull disciples' minds to the purposes of God; in debate with His keen and urgent enemies; and in His encounter, at the last, with the powers of this world. Such an answer would, I say, probably be the readiest to spring to our minds, and it would appear at first very plausible. Nevertheless it is the exact opposite of the facts of the case.

The Gospels have given us several glimpses into our Lord's moments of prayer. And so far from finding them filled with peace, we discern in many of them effort, struggle and even agony. He who did His wonderful works with a word or even only a gesture, lifted His heart to the Father on His way to them with pain and trouble. He came to the grave of Lazarus with prayer (for He said, when He had come, *Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest me*), and during that prayer *He groaned in the Spirit and troubled Himself*, and again *groaning in Himself He cometh to the tomb.*[1] Again, when the Greeks sought Him at

[1] John xi. 33, 38, 41.

the Feast, and He lifted His soul in prayer to the Father He said, *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.*[1] And at the last, in the night time, in the garden, under the trees, when He went forward without His disciples, He *kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.*[2] That these were not solitary occasions, but that such was our Lord's prevailing temper in prayer, we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which tells us[3] that *in the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.*

Now it was just because our Lord made Prayer the real battlefield of life, and there won His victory, that through the rest of His days below He moved as one who is already conqueror, and waits but to gather the spoils of His triumph: achieving His miracles with (as I have said) a word

[1] John xii. 27, 28. [2] Luke xxii. 42, 44. [3] v. 7.

or a gesture; turning His enemies in their controversy with a sentence; bearing in peace the contradiction of sinners against Himself; and at the last facing the majesty of Rome with the utterance: *Thou wouldest have no power against me except it were given thee from above.*[1] Look at these two pictures separated by only a few hours: the struggle in the night time, in the garden under the trees, alone with the Father; the peace, the air of victory in the morning, in the sunshine, before the crowds and all the might of Rome itself!

Some few in our day have learned this habit of our Lord—to make prayer the real battle of life. I think especially of General Gordon, a soul who by many ways entered into the secret of his Lord and by none more than this. I have heard that he said more than once: "I had a hard half hour this morning hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord." In his *Letters to his Sister* published after his death, General Gordon's spiritual life is very fully disclosed. Now among those letters we find a number of phrases like the following: "Just before I left I told you about Agag;" "the only way to

[1] John xix. 11.

fight Anak is to keep in union with God in Christ;" "my constant prayer is against Agag, who of course is here and as insinuating as ever;" and so forth. Now, Agag was no Chinaman, nor Turkish pasha nor Soudanese slave-driver; nor any of those foes of flesh and blood against whom Gordon carved out his great career; but just that old and evil self in meeting and overcoming which consists the duty, the appointed warfare, the sanctification and growth of character, of every one of us. "Agag—catering for notice and praise, 'Look what I have done.'" And it was just because Gordon had thus discovered his Lord's secret of making prayer the real battlefield of life, that through the rest of his deeds he moved with something of his Master's spirit of victory and peace upon him; walking up, as we are told he did in the Chinese war, to the cannon's mouth with only a rattan in his hand; ready at the call of duty to go to the ends of the earth on a moment's notice; and at the last alone, forsaken, destitute, yet laying down his life without fear, before the howling mob of his murderers.

Have we learned this secret of Christ—that

Prayer is, not the mere preparation or discipline for the conflict, but the conflict and the struggle itself? Is it not rather, because we have failed to understand this, because we have not seen nor exercised the practical possibilities which lie in prayer, when thus regarded, that our belief in it and our practice of it are so wavering and unreal? Why have most men and women who have given up regular prayer—and their number is perhaps greater than we have any idea of—why have they done so? And why have we who are Christians so little faith and constancy in Prayer? For this reason, that we ignore the meaning Christ put into it, and fail to see how critical it is; and how practical and full of moral potency it may be made. I do not believe that many men and women cease to pray because of intellectual reasons, or that in every case the cause of their neglect is the consciousness of some cherished sin, without throwing away which they recognise that prayer for them would be insincere and useless. Some may cease to pray from such motives; but I believe that a great majority slide into prayerlessness by ways far less conscious and thoughtful. Other earnest things in life have

risen before them and robbed this of its earnestness. The intensity of it, the practical and serious nature of it, has dwindled before the appearance of other duties and other tests in their experience.

For I suppose that in this Christian land we have all been brought up to pray, and have kept to the habit through our childhood. Nor is it when we first leave home and go out into the world that we leave it behind. Prayer is often the only bit of home and childhood which we can carry with us, and therefore for a time a young man will cling the more passionately to it; and the habit may even assume a charm he never felt while sheltered and cared for. But then other duties and responsibilities descend, and seem to draw the earnestness out of this one: college-tasks, business, serious intellectual problems, or the burdens of service to other lives. If we are honest and have a work to do, those will be the first things we think of when we wake. We will be eager to get at them, and anything that comes in the way may grow to be felt as a delay and interruption to our duty. From such experiences there is nothing which suffers more than Prayer; nothing which men are so plausibly tempted by the serious-

ness of life to regard as in comparison a mere formality, or at most a dispensable luxury. And so they come to hurry over it, or to omit it altogether, that they may get to the work of which their minds are rightly full.

All that looks honest and plausible, but it is fatally wrong. He who faces his life—who faces one day of life—without prayer shall be like one who fights with an unbeaten foe on his rear as well as in front of him. But he who follows his Lord and, making Prayer the real battlefield of his life, overcomes there his passions, his fears, his entanglements with evil and the other temptations that beset him, shall move like his Lord unencumbered and unharassed to the nobler issues of life, and achieve them, in choice and deed, simply and easily.

Do not think that in all this I am pressing upon you anything sensational or exaggerated; anything that is beyond your daily duty or the needs of your daily health. You know, if you are awake, what is in front of you: what calls, what burdens, what possible bearing of pain and disappointment. You know what distractions are certain to come in your way towards these; what

besetting sins you have; what temptations are ready to harass and weaken you. Give yourself a little time to realise these alone with God. Summon them to His Presence; summon them by their right names. Consider their severity, their danger, the power of death to your character, which lies in them. Lay to your heart, as Christ did, the awful difficulty of doing your Father's will in face of them. And then in the full sense of all this, grapple with their power over you. Resolve to overcome them; and by Christ's own promise you shall overcome them then and there; and you shall move through the rest of your life, not untempted indeed, but unencumbered by the baser and more irritating of such enemies, and with much of your Master's peace and power about you.

III

But our warfare is not finished by one victory. Through life our warfare is endless, and every victory requires a new enlistment and consecration of our wills to His service. It is in this that the third aspect of our Lord's Example in Prayer consists.

In the First Chapter of Mark's Gospel we read that our Lord spent a Sabbath day at Capernaum in teaching and healing. I have already asked you to remember the strain which such work put upon Him; how much of Himself He spent in curing diseased bodies and minds; how with every single case *virtue went out of Him.* And we are to remember, also, that this particularly exhausting day, when *all the city was gathered to His door*, and *they brought unto Him all that were sick and them that were possessed with devils*, was spent by our Lord—like so much of His ministry—in a sultry and enervating climate, at the bottom of that deep trench, in which the Sea of Galilee lies nearly seven hundred feet below the level of the Ocean. Yet after such a day in such a place, our Lord did not pass the whole of the following night in sleep; but *in the morning a great while before day, He rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed.* That is, our Lord not only made prayer the battle-field of life, but when the victory came He followed it up with renewed prayer and communion with His Father. Every fresh achievement of power He made a fresh occasion for

enlistment to the struggle before Him. Every summit to which His Father lifted Him, He used as an altar for another consecration of Himself to the Father's service.

It is probably owing to our neglect of this part of our Lord's example in prayer, that we suffer in our moral lives from so much fickleness, declension and disappointment; that our characters do not steadily progress; and that in particular, on the back of so many victories or attainments, we so often and so suddenly suffer from falls and defeats; or at least, to our disheartening, find ourselves assailed by many temptations which we believed we had overcome once for all. We have forgotten the need for renewed devotion.

Disbanded soldiers make dangerous citizens; and a regiment which has proved itself strong on a foreign field and in face of the enemy, has sometimes been known on its return home to give way to disorder and disgraceful excess. Now each of us is a little company of faculties and affections; which, so long as danger confronts them and duty takes the aspect of serious battle, hold together firm and vigilant against the foe. So long as the excitement of the conflict is upon them they

amply prove their value and faithfulness; but when the strain relaxes they tend to scatter upon lower aims and even involve us in disgrace. Each of us must be able to look back upon some experiences of this kind, which ought to make him feel the need of following his Lord's example in using every attainment or victory, to which he has been lifted, as an occasion for fresh consecration of himself to God's service.

I remember some years ago climbing the Weisshorn, above the Zermatt Valley, with two guides. There had been a series of severe storms, and ours was the first ascent for some weeks. Consequently we had a great deal of step-cutting to do up the main *arête*. We had left the cabin at two in the morning, and it was nearly nine before we reached the summit, which consisted, as on so many peaks in the Alps, of splintered rocks protruding from the snow. My leading guide stood aside to let me be first on the top. And I, with the long labour of the climb over, and exhilarated by the thought of the great view awaiting me, but forgetful of the high gale that was blowing on the other side of the rocks, sprang eagerly up them, and stood erect to see the view.

The guide pulled me down—"On your knees, Sir; you are not safe there except on your knees."

My young friends, God lifts us all to summits in life; high, splendid and perilous. But these are nowhere more splendid or more perilous than in our youth—summits of knowledge, of friendship, of love, of success. Let us, as we value our moral health, the growth of our character and of our fitness for God's service, use every one of them as an altar, on which to devote ourselves once more to His will.

V

WHILE YE HAVE THE LIGHT

Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.—Psalm civ. 23.

While ye have the Light, believe in the Light, that ye may become the children of Light.—John xii. 36.

IT was characteristic of Jesus Christ to declare Himself to be the Light, for practical ends. Light is glorious in itself: it is its own evidence and needs neither herald nor argument. Christ might have compared Himself to Light in either of these respects. But Light is also practical, calling to life and action, and it is clear from our Lord's words that this was the sense in which He gave Himself the name. On each of the occasions on which He used it He coupled it with a distinct call to progress or to labour. *I am the Light of the World; he that followeth Me shall not walk*

in darkness. The night cometh when no man can work; as long as I am in the world I am the Light of the World. Yet a little while is the Light with you; walk while ye have the Light.

You see His meaning. Like the sun He shines not to be gazed at but to be used. To man He is to be what the sun is for movement and for work. *The sun ariseth and the wild beasts get them away and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour till the evening.* You see the swift, broad picture. Light is the dispersion of all that is cruel and unclean. But it is man's opportunity. Among all that a sunrise reveals—the sea like a mirror of gold, meadow and forest sparkling with dew, kindled mountain peaks, and the glory of heaven—nothing is more noticeable to this Psalmist than man going out to his daily work. It is for him—for that common figure, for that daily commonplace start again at the ordinary tasks—that the universal miracle has taken place.

Christ meant not differently about Himself. *The Light of the World*—think what it implies. The Light in which all the space and all the life of the great world shall first appear; the Light from

which everything that is bestial shall shrink abashed, in which everything worthy to live shall lift its head with new hope; the Light in which this vast dwelling-place of men shall be seen to be full of material and advantage, covered with paths of duty and ways to truth and occasions of service; the Light in which shall appear the pity of the multitude and the dignity of the individual, and men be aware of each other's beauty and each other's need; in which the disguise and surprise of evil shall be no more possible, fear and ignorance vanish, and love have her perfect reign. The Light of the World means all this, but as in the Psalm, it is again the figure of man at work which is led to the foreground; and Christ tells us that it is for this He has come: *Walk* while ye have the Light; *work* while it is called to-day.

With this general sense of what Christ meant when He called Himself the Light of the World we come to our second text. Our Lord is still speaking of Himself. The Pharisees expected a Messiah, who should abide for ever; but Christ says He shall soon be taken from them, and He adds, *While ye have the Light, believe in the Light, that ye may become the children of Light.* I

wish to look with you at these three clauses—but I wish principally to dwell on that shortness of the opportunity of moral Light, which the first expresses, and to be very brief on the other two.

I

First—*While ye have the Light.*

Among the many resemblances, which exist between physical and moral Light, one of the most striking is that neither of them is shed upon us in a constant stream; but that both are intermittent and periodical; both are broken up into seasons bound by certain and inexorable darkness.

When in the beginning God said: *Let there be Light, and there was Light*, Light did not spring into undivided empire, but was ordained to rule alternately with darkness. Day and night abide for ever. What was the reason, so far as man is concerned, for this curbing and restriction of so free an element as Light? The readiest reason seems to be—for our relief and rest. But that is not half the reason. Our light is broken up and shortened, not only in order to afford us intervals of rest, but also to bestow upon us intensity; not only to relieve our faculties from the strain of life, but to

strain and stimulate them ever the more keenly. According to Christ Himself the *night cometh when no man can work*, not merely that man may hope for release beneath its shelter, but that he may *work while it is called to-day*. Had there been no interval, since first upon the tones of God's word Light rippled across the face of the deep—had the Sun been created to stand still in the midst of the heavens, then indeed one might say there would have been no progress for man. Let your imagination strike Night out of the world, and you need not begin to speculate on the iron frames we men should have required to bear the unrelieved strain, for it is tolerably certain that, without the urgency and discipline which a limited day brings upon our life, we should never have been stimulated to enough of toil to make us weary. Night, which has been called the Liberator of the Slave, is far more the taskmistress of the free—a taskmistress who does not scourge nor drive us in panic, but startles our sluggishness, rallies our wandering thoughts, develops our instincts of order, reduces our impulsiveness to methods, incites us to our very best, and only then crowns her beneficence by rewarding our obedience with

rest. In short, Night, while she is nature's mercy on our weakness, is nature's purest discipline for our strength. The Psalmist was right: *So teach us to number our days, that we may get us an heart of wisdom.*[1] Time is not only a condition of our being; it is a great moral provision.

But all this about physical Light is equally, though not so regularly, true of moral Light. The moral heavens have their night for each of us, as much as the physical. Just as the sun is always shining, and yet each part of the world has its determined hours for seeing his face and its set seasons for rejoicing in his heat; so our Father in Heaven, the Father of Lights, is without variableness or shadow of turning, and yet in our moral experience day and night, summer and winter, are as real facts as in the course of nature.

That is a truth of which Scripture never ceases reminding us. There is hardly one prophet who does not proclaim how short man's day of work is—how brief and single is the summer granted to each man's character to ripen in. Sometimes it is life as a whole which they look at, and tell us that is our day; if we miss it there is nothing beyond.

[1] Ps. xc. 12.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest;[1] or again, it is of certain parts of life they speak, as of youth: *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth while the evil days come not;*[2] and again, *Give glory to the* LORD *your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains; and while ye look for light He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.*[3] And you remember those frequent phrases which toll through Scripture like the tolling of a bell that marks the passing of a life. *This is the day of the Lord. For He is our God, to-day if you will hear His voice. Now is the accepted time and now is the day of salvation.* We hear of God offering truth for a day, and doing deliverance in a day—*the day of the Lord, the day of visitation, the day of salvation.*

Now, I dare say, there is no one here who has not been tempted to imagine that this way of putting the matter was simply a rhetorical device on the part of the prophets, a bit of prophetic licence. My brothers, look within yourselves,

[1] Eccl. ix. 10. [2] Eccl. xiv. 1. [3] Jeremiah xiii. 16.

consult your own moral experience, and you will see that your imagination is not correct. So far from being a rhetorical figure, this shortness of the day of grace, this strict limitation of the time of moral influence is a certain and a commonplace fact. In every man's moral life there is a to-day, which most surely becomes an irrevocable yesterday. Like the body, the soul is born into seasons, but with this difference, that while the body if in health can hardly fail to respond to genial influences, the separate faculties of the soul may miss their opportunity and sleep through their single summer.

That is true of our nature on all sides. Charles Darwin, by far the greatest observer of our time, watched other things than the habits of the lower animals. He observed himself; and in the few pages of his autobiography I find facts as interesting as any he has left us in his volumes of natural history. Here is his confirmation of the truth of what we are studying: "Up to the age of thirty poetry of many kinds gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare. I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable and music very great delight.

But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music. If I had to live my life again I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature."

Brethren, most men can bear witness to a similar loss; yet in things more essential to the moral character than poetry or pictures or music. There is, for instance, the moral light which appeals so strongly to every healthy youth, and which if unfollowed, unobeyed, seems so irrevocably lost—I mean the star of purity. On how many a youth did that star shine—perhaps from a firmament crossed by no other guide or harbinger of hope—as clear as the star which drew the wise men of the East to the cradle of Christ! But their skirts were pulled by some base affection; a tempting face, the

page of an evil book, a dream of their own hot hearts came between the star and their eyes. They ceased to follow it. Time after time they turned to what was base, till never again have they seen the star, never again been able to believe that for them purity was possible.

Is it different in the case of some, with the ideals of justice, of honour and of generosity, which are natural to all in their youth? A man begins his business career with the moral heaven unclouded above him. He will do, he vows to God, every act of his life in its sunshine. He will shape his conduct by all it shows him of duty, by all it puts into him of health. But his patience fails against adversity. Clouds come over his sky—they are only the mist sent up by his own weariness—and men tell him the heaven he believed in is not real: that he has worn himself out pursuing the impossible. So he turns from his ideals, and ignores them, till when he is haunted by the memory of them, and conscience wakes, he tells himself they were a boy's dream. A boy's dream? Nay, the boy's day. An old man's dream, if you like, for to him they are past and irrecoverable. But that light was the boy's day. He could have

grown in it, worked in it, found true friends in it, and seen his way clear through the world to God and his everlasting home.

These are but a couple of instances from experiences which few are without. They are facts as true as any Darwin records. As true, but with this difference. His can be put down coldly with pen and ink before the eyes of the world. These burn themselves in letters of fire on the heart.

You cannot then say that those appeals of Scripture are mere imagery and rhetoric. For none of us does moral opportunity last for ever. For each of us these great, glad words: *Ye have the light* must be introduced by a solemn *while. The night cometh.* I do not say that the abused, the lost, Light is always irrecoverable. God is patient: and Christ is the power of God to salvation. But even He, the greatest moral opportunity of life—that in which all others we have lost may be recovered—shares with them all their character of definiteness, of limitation. Light of the world indeed He is, and in His unfading beams the world shall grow better, happier, richer through the ages. Let there be but a handful of corn left on the earth; with Him for its sun the

fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon. It has happened before, and will happen again. Humanity must grow greater and purer beneath His shining. Yet for you and for me He is not eternal.

> "A hundred summers deck the tree,
> But only one the leaf;
> A thousand summers bless the lea,
> But only one the sheaf."

Why do we speak only of great men as having their day? Every character among us has its day. What is conspicuous in them, is equally real in us. Christ shall reign and shine for ever, but you and I have only this life to find Him. Perhaps, young men and women, you have only your youth.

II

Now of this day Christ says: Believe in it. *Believe in the Light.* That is, at first hearing, a strange word to use of Light. And yet it is the fittest to use even of that physical Light which we see by the outward eye. We do not look at the Sun, for that would be to dazzle and blind us, but we use the Sun's light, we read the world as he reveals it to us, we put the brightness he brings us to some practical advantage. And that is just to

believe in his light. Of some men we may say that they do not believe that it is day, for they do not use it as day. They waste it, not being really awake. They ignore its value: they do not believe in it.

All this is much more true of moral Light. To believe in such is to read life as it reveals life; to take as evil what it displays as evil, to hold as firm the path which it lights up before us, to hold as realities and not as dreams the ideals which it kindles in our skies, and to press on with all our hearts to their pursuit and conquest. To believe in the Light is to use it; to feel that it has been given to us for practical purposes: for conduct, for the perception of truth, for the growth of character. To believe in the Light, I say, is to use it; for after all there is no real difference between faith and work. Faith in a thing means faith in its practical effectiveness: setting to work with it, using it, rejoicing in it.

And this was what Christ meant about Himself. Read life as I show it. Take for granted My explanation of things, and the character I give them. Use Myself, while you have Me, use Me for your life.

Believe in the Light. Christ never uttered a more searching or a more comprehensive word. Which of us can escape the responsibility it lays upon us? For believing in the Light is not having correct theories of it. But believing in the Light, is allowing it to bear upon our Life, trusting the path it opens, discovering in it our duty and the heart of our brother; using it to get on with our work and to serve one another.

The beams of Light which shine from Christ are many. That the Almighty is our Father, infinite in Love; that He grants forgiveness and release from despair to all who truly turn to Him; that holiness is possible, and virtue can be victorious because both are His will; that it is better for a man to bear anything rather than to sin; that work is hopeful, and the doing of duty neither vain nor unblest; that suffering comes of the love of God, and is the way to peace. To believe in the Light is to believe all these; is to believe, and to act upon the belief, that Christ can be imitated, does become our daily strength, and is brought down into our hearts and lives by a regular and patient devotion to Him.

III

That ye may become children of Light—that is, natives of it, with the Light in our hearts and the health of it in our blood. For to-day the most of us do not live our lives with our eyes open and our hearts pure. Either we do our daily duty in blindfold routine, like a horse on the round of a mill-path, and with no sense of the meaning or the joy of what we do. Or else, if our eyes be open and our hearts keen, and we desire not to be the blind slaves of habit, we are troubled by having to turn from the use of the Light to constant enquiry about it; and we are hindered in the work we have to do while it is yet day, by having perpetually to ask whether it really be day after all.

But this our destiny, to which Christ calls us through belief in the Light, is that estate in which we shall have burst equally from the blindness of mere habit and the shadows and perplexities of doubt; in which we shall be as little dead to God and His meaning for our life, as far from doubting or being unconscious of them, as loving children are beyond doubting or being unconscious

of their father. There shall be no more any mere routine of virtue, nor any scepticism about it; but we shall use the Light with open eyes and clean hearts, as freely and joyfully doing the Father's will as Christ Himself.

What a hope is this, and how it brightens the present hours of dulness and hesitation! This is what loyalty to the Light must bring us. Everything hard and steep—it is a step towards power. Everything that goes against our present nature—it is the winning of a new one. Every act of trust in the Light leads to knowledge, and every obedience to freedom. *While ye have the Light, believe in the Light, that ye may become the children of Light.*

VI

THE TWO WILLS

When He was accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto Him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He gave him no answer, not even to one word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. . . . Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. But the governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? And they said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus which is called Christ? They all say, Let Him be crucified. And he said, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let Him be crucified!—MATTHEW xxvii. 12-14, 20-23.

NEVER was tragedy so awful or so swift as that which St. Matthew recounts in the chapter from which these verses are taken. And this is because the two elements of all Tragedy,

the Will of God and the Will of Man, are there combined and running to the same end. In most other tragedies, which have happened upon this woeful world of ours, these two are separate and even hostile. Sometimes, as chiefly in Ancient Tragedy, it is the inscrutable, irresistible will of God which carries all before it, baffling the reason and breaking the hearts of the purest and bravest of men. Fate and man helpless before it form the interest and the pathos. In much of Modern Tragedy, again, what fascinates us is human responsibility; the demoniac power of the individual will; how *it* may defeat the plans and defy the love of God Himself.

But in that Tragedy, which divides the Ancient from the Modern world, the love of God and the evil will of man conspire to the same end. Hence the horror and the speed of it. The Cloud and the Flood have met: Heaven dark with judgment, earth swept by passion; Christ by silence consenting to His death, the crowds shouting, *Crucify Him! crucify Him!*

We have all been puzzled by the difficulty of reconciling these two: *first*, that God willed Christ's death: as St. Paul says, *He spared not His*

own Son, but delivered Him up for us all;[1] and second, that man was guilty of that death: as St. Stephen says, *The Righteous One, of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers*.[2] Let us turn from the speculation, as to how that judgment and that guilt may be reconciled, to a simple study of the fact that both were present in the Death of Christ, which the Gospels make sufficiently plain. And let us lay most stress on the human share in this great event, so that we may feel the responsibility which is laid upon every common man of coming to a decision about Christ; of deciding it may be between Christ and so ugly an alternative as Barabbas.

I

Nothing is clearer from the Gospels than this: that it was Christ's own will to die. He had long set His face steadfastly to Jerusalem. While others still deemed it impossible, His soul lay already under the Shadow of the Cross.

Some men make up their mind to die, when they feel the stress of circumstance bearing in that direction. And, indeed, he is invested with a

[1] Romans viii. 32. [2] Acts vii. 52.

certain sacredness, however mean in soul he may be, whom we see delivered to death by events over which he has no control. But Jesus felt no outward circumstance compelling Him to death. Circumstance, in truth, was much the other way. Humanly speaking His Cross was not inevitable. There were moments when He might have escaped. But He stirred up the Pharisees, disappointed the people who would have made Him King, bade Judas do his business, and, last of all, was silent before Pilate.

It is no less clear that He did this in order to fulfil a mission laid upon Him by His Father. He regarded opportunities to escape as temptations. The lips of flesh would be excused from touching that burning cup and prayed: *Father, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from me.* But he added, *Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done.* Because it was His Father's will He set His face to the Cross.

He also declared why He must suffer. This was not for martyrdom alone. He had come to bear witness to the truth among a people who, as He pointed out, had with tragic consistency slain their prophets. Yet the burden of truth He

brought from Heaven was not the only burden He carried. He found another awaiting Him on earth in the sins of men; and this, though sinless Himself, He stooped to bear in all its weight. For, besides meeting temptation in its force, as only He could who fought it to victory, and enduring in all its rigour the moral warfare appointed to every man; He had lifted the burden of the miseries which sin has brought upon the world. Sinless Himself, He had felt the shame and the guilt of sin as never the best or the worst of men had felt it. He had confessed it for others; He had borne it in prayer to God. He had proclaimed its forgiveness. And finally He had connected His Death with that forgiveness. *I give my life*, He said, *a ransom for many. This is the New Covenant in my blood, shed for many, for the remission of sins.*

All this was settled and clear before morning broke upon that Friday. That is why He was so silent before the Jewish Council and with Pilate. Why should He argue? The great Argument of His life was over; the Argument with God in the night-time, in the Garden; and His heart was set past doubt or fear upon the Cross. He would not

say anything for His own sake to turn the undecided Pilate. For Pilate was but the instrument of the Father's will—*Thou wouldest have no power against me except it were given thee from above*[1]—and Jesus knew His Father's will to be that He should die.

It was the Feast of the Jewish Passover. There was a custom at the time to set free one prisoner, to pardon one criminal. Israel had been prisoners in the land of Egypt, and on the first Passover night God had both spared and released them. Whatever the Romans thought of the custom, it is obvious that the Jews themselves took it as a memorial of their nation's deliverance, a symbol of God's sparing and redeeming mercy.

But at this Passover the custom was to be repeated with an exhibition of that mercy to which their excited souls were blind. For among the prisoners, who might be released, was Jesus Christ Himself, standing side by side with a very notorious criminal; and the people were given the power to choose between them, yet not without Christ's own consent. One word, such as a Roman centurion had deemed sufficient from those

[1] John xix. 11.

lips, might easily, it would appear, have persuaded the perplexed governor to spare a Person, with whose greatness and with whose innocence he was manifestly impressed. But this Person, who was indeed the Son of God, and who carried in His heart all God's love for men, was silent; so that upon the insistence of the crowd the other prisoner was saved and set free. We are not told what feelings of pity moved our Lord for this man, whom they brought up from the dungeon and placed in the sunshine by His side, while the balance trembled between them. But we know that such compassion must have been but a single drop of the infinite love which filled His heart for all sinners and for their sakes kept Him silent when a word might have saved Him. It was not for Barabbas only He was silent. On that day Christ Jesus laid down His life for men.

This is His own testimony—that in giving Himself to death He was earning for men the forgiveness of their sins, freedom to come to God, power to break from evil; and, in all that, the assurance of a new life which can never be taken from them.

To this testimony, the experience of men, who

have believed it, has corresponded. With or without theories of Atonement they have found that it has wakened their penitence, answered their conscience, brought them to God, assured them of His Love, and filled them with fresh moral power. For, first, they have been startled by Christ's Agony into feeling what sin is, what it costs, what it means in estranging God from man, and the suffering it therefore lays on the hearts of both. At the foot of Christ's Cross, they have known a conscience of sin, a horror of it, and by consequence a penitence for their own share in it deeper than anything else has started in human experience. And as thus their whole spiritual nature has been roused, and they have awakened to the truth that it would not have been safe, nor in anywise morally well, for them to have been forgiven by mere clemency and without feeling what sin costs, they have come to understand that in His sufferings Christ was their Substitute. The question of the justice of such a substitution has not disturbed their faith; for if they have thought about it, they have remembered that, apart from Christ, it happens again and again in human experience, that the innocent suffer, and gladly suffer, for the guilty,

with moral results of the most beneficial kind to the latter. In Christ they see God's love proving itself not less, in sympathy and identification with the worst, than human love has again and again attempted to be.

They have not, of course, imagined that Christ's was a physical substitution; for in their most awakened moments they have not conceived the forgiveness, which they sought, to consist essentially in the removal of the physical consequences of their sins. The forgiveness they desired, may have held that element in it as an incident; but it essentially consisted in the restoration of God's love and trust, to their unworthy souls.[1] Now Christ bore all that had made this restoration impossible. He entered, as they could not have done, and therefore *for* them, into the meaning of sin and its effects. He felt the bitterness of their estrangement from God, the loss of the sense of being His sons, which sin had cost men: in a word, the real punishment of sin. And by becoming one with Him, in all this, His experience in life and death, they knew, in fulfilment of His word, that the Father had forgiven them, and

[1] See pp. 17-25.

for Christ's sake trusted them once more as His children.

We do not know what happened to Barabbas. Scripture, which tells us of so full a future for the penitent thief, records no more of this man. But of this we may be sure, that if Barabbas remained unchanged, it was because that morning when he dropped from the jailors' hands into the crowd, he heard nothing but Pilate's voice commanding to set him free; and felt only the selfish gladness that once more he had escaped. But if he changed, if he led a new life, and as an old legend has it, became a servant of God, it was because he understood the meaning of that silence in which Christ assented to His own death and so let him go free.

And so, brethren, with ourselves. If we think we can take God's forgiveness of His mere clemency, or because He bestows it by bare authority, or in virtue of some magical transaction we cannot understand, we shall not know those moral benefits for which forgiveness can alone be bestowed by God or were worth the taking by ourselves. We must feel what our pardon cost the Love of God, and how much

that Love in Christ endured for us. Then shall there be born in us a penitence, a faith, a gratitude which will bind us to God, which will give us a hatred for sin, which will beget in us a power of holiness—as nothing else can.

So much for the will of God in the sufferings and death of Christ. We turn now to the will and sin of man.

II

If by their sin men made the death of Christ necessary, it is not strange, in order to bring this home to our hearts, that human responsibility for that death should continue to the very end—the last nail which pierced Him, the last jest which the crowd spattered upon His sufferings. And so the shout, *Crucify Him, crucify Him*, came that day not with thunder from Heaven, but from the throats of a multitude of men.

The way in which human guilt is brought out in this chapter is very tragic. First there is Judas, the only one who accepted his guilt, and it overwhelmed him. The rest shirked their responsibility, and sought to pass it over to one another. But they could not, for the lesson of the chapter is

that, where Christ is in question, every man must make decision for himself. Peter shirked it, the Jewish Council shirked it, Pilate shirked it, and so it came back upon the People; yet not so that the rest escaped. Let us confine ourselves to the People.

It is significant that our Lord was slain by no mere drift of circumstance, but by the deliberate and confessed choice of men's wills, and that He was doomed to the Cross not by the supreme Roman authority, but, before it could pass sentence, by the voice of the People. Think of what the People and their leaders had done. They had tried to get rid of the charge of blasphemy they brought against our Lord, and now accused Him of treason against Cæsar. Blind hearts! Every one of them had been nearer making Him King than He had been Himself. It was not He but they who had sinned against Cæsar. Yet they made the charge in order to get His blood taken off their hands. It was to be returned to them; as if God would have this made clear, that no man who has known Christ may escape a decision regarding Him.

They stood outside the Court, because on that

day it was not lawful for them to enter Gentile precincts. But even so they did not escape, for the Governor brought Christ out to them, and in the end every man of them became His judge. It was a strange sight to see the haughty Roman power, usually so contemptuous of a foreign people, delegating itself to a mob. What does this mean, that the death of our Lord was decreed not within that Court by a fragment of the great political machine which covered the world, but out there on the open streets, where men had heard Him speak, on the ordinary stage of their lives, where He had helped and blessed them; not by official authority, but on the streets of common life and by the passions of common men?

To me it is too striking a symbol of what always happens when Christ is in question, to be lightly passed over.

God will have every common man who has known Christ, to come to a decision about Him. This was what Christ came into the world for. And we, to whom He has been presented all our lives, can, least of all, hope to escape. The claims of Christ on the world are not going to be settled

by our authorities—either in philosophy or theology. His last appeal is not to the wisdoms or the powers of the world, but to the common human heart, with all its prejudice and passion: it is to you and to me.

Was not this ever His way? He, who was silent to the Sanhedrin as to Pilate, laid bare His nature to the blind beggar on the Temple stairs, reasoned with the woman by the well in Samaria, took exceeding pains with Nicodemus. Dumb before Herod, He gave His whole Gospel to the Thief on the Cross. This was ever His way—to seek the common heart, and to argue with it for itself.

Nor let us fail to notice the hour in which the men of Jerusalem were called to give their decision.

The crowd which clamoured for the blood of Jesus was much the same, which, less than a week before, had shouted Hosanna as He entered their city and had hailed Him as King. To a human eye, that would have seemed the cardinal point in the history of their relations with Him. But God chose another hour for the crisis. He chose, not the day of their easy enthusiasm, but that of their power; the one day in the year when they

were given the right to deal with Jesus as they willed; the one set of conditions in which it was possible for Jesus to be set up before their eyes with an alternative, and they knew their power to choose. The supreme moment in the history of Christ with themselves was not when He came to them as *the King in His beauty;* but when He stood an equal alternative with Barabbas.

Each of our souls has a history with Christ. What are the most decisive moments of that experience? Not—let us know it for our salvation—those of worship, enthusiasm, sacrament; but the other perilous hours of choice, when our wills are left to ourselves, when our natural affections are awake, and the touch of devotion is not upon them; and there stand out clear to our mind and urgent upon our responsibility Christ and something else. Something else, and how often is that a mere Barabbas!

Brothers, none of us knows the others' besetting sins. But we know this that we are going to be judged by our choice between these and our loyalty to Jesus Christ. It is not our attitude to our Lord in the easy hours of worship, which determines our true relation to Him; not our

admiration of the progress He makes as King down the ages, nor our assent to the outward authorities established in His Name; not our joy in the pomp and circumstance which men have gathered in His honour; not the hymns we sing in His praise nor the temples we build for His worship. Our real heart for Him is shown, our true relation to Him is determined, far rather in those other, darker hours, when temptation is strong upon us; and we have to choose between Himself and our sin. May God's Spirit enforce upon our minds that this, our relation to Christ, upon which hang our character and our peace for time and for eternity, turns neither upon the inclination of our emotions nor upon our intellectual assent, nor upon our adherence to human authority or custom, but essentially upon the giving of our will to Him—upon our choice of Him, to whom experience presents to us so many alternatives.

VII

THE MORAL MEANING OF HOPE

But according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in His sight.—2 Peter iii. 13, 14.

TO the conscience of man the Christian religion presents two views of the future, which, however alike they be in their proper demands upon us, greatly differ in appearance and in scale.

Sometimes it is a narrow vista which opens up to each of us—which opens up to a man from his own feet, as if all his life were a racecourse, and his one duty were to keep his eye upon the thin ribbon of the track, and the sharp goal at the end of it: his single salvation.

But along other lines of view the prospect

changes. I lift my eyes and see no more that one point of welcome pricked out in the darkness for me. It is lost in the radiance of the whole horizon. My heart is summoned not as to a goal, not as to a strait gate, not as to a Father's arms opened only for me—but to a Kingdom, to a day as broad as the world, to new heavens and a new earth. It is this prospect which the apostle opens through our text, and yet he draws from it a consequence as personal as any which is drawn from the other. His consequence is character. The future glory is universal, on the scale of heaven and earth. But its re-action and its focus upon to-day are personal and singular. *Wherefore, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless.*

Now, character is thus related to hope along both of two lines. It may be represented as the proper effect of so rich a hope, our grateful and natural response to such a gift; or character may be represented as being the only means of bringing such a hope to pass, our practical duty in the face of a divine opportunity. It is possible, of course, to separate these two logically. I propose that now we should dwell principally on the first; but use

the inspiration we thereby win for a few incidental illustrations of the second.

One of the commonplaces of our life is the contrast between the unsubstantial quality of hope, and the solid proofs of her practical power which she leaves in experience. All our hopes are like that bridge of moonshine which the young Ottoman prince saw flash to him across the Hellespont. For years the Strait had marked the limit of his nation's power. They had overrun Asia, but were arrested here. And he, who had been born and who had grown to leadership on these shores, used to pace them in royal discontent that there was no room left for him also to go forward like his fathers. But one night (as the story goes) on which he had come out alone with his despair, the full moon suddenly burst the clouds and flashed a path to the opposite continent. In a moment his feelings changed. He made the resolution; and the shining had not faded from the waters before an Ottoman band was over and in possession of the first post of those European domains which the Turks have held for five hundred years.

It is the way with all great hopes. Seeming unsubstantial as the moonlight, they are neverthe-

less strong bridges across the impossible, without which few enterprises would be imagined, and none achieved.

What are the contents of this commonplace? The chief contents, the indispensable ones, are without doubt ethical. As all the writers of the New Testament insist, hope helps a man first of all by rousing his conscience. This is certainly part of what Paul means when he says: *We were saved by hope.*[1] A great hope, whatever its object be, quickens the moral sense. So St. John declares explicitly of the Christian's chief expectation. *We shall see Him as He is; and everyone that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as He is pure.*[2] And so St. Peter in our text: *Seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye be found without spot.*

Now, this is true even of the common hopes of life, the objects of which are not primarily ethical. On those of us who at this time close their university career, and their preparation for the work of their lives, these common hopes are richly breaking: hopes that spring from a long sense of the light of intellectual comradeship and rivalry;

[1] Romans viii. 24. [2] 1 John iii. 2, 3.

hopes that start from the surprise of new ideas, without the sobering experience of how slowly, relatively to the length of individual lives, ideas work; hopes that issue from having mastered the results of the leaders of our race, with your strength still unspent; hopes that spring from the first appreciation of the opportunities of the great professions, without any experience of their strain, their competition and their jealousies—hopes which only those may feel who still look out on life with strength unwasted and hearts uncompromised.

What I seek to impress upon you is, that the thrill and assurance with which you feel these hopes are vain unless at the same time they become a conscience within you. Do not suppose it is by the new elasticity we feel in mind and body that *hope saves us.* Hope saves us by revealing ourselves. Her light leaps upon us with questions louder than any voice, and more full of awe than we shall find even the darkness of death to be. Are you ready for me? Are you worthy of me? Of course, a man may have had much previous discipline, and when his long-deferred hope comes at last, he may rise and go to meet her with as

honest a pride as a bridegroom. But I imagine that there are few of us who do not require to feel in the presence of even the most indulgent and best deserved of all our hopes a shame and anxiety about ourselves. Believe, brothers, however bright be the ideals granted to-day to your minds, their first office is to show you the sordidness of the real within yourselves. Rejoice in the buoyancy and spontaneousness which a shining hope bestows, but remember that Hope is given for self-knowledge as well, and while she draws out your heart to her pray her to search it. Launch forth upon those shining paths of light which heaven casts across the untried ocean of life to the feet of every healthy youth: *but give diligence that ye may be found without spot and blameless in His sight—in His sight*, for every hope, however common, is the eye of God upon you.

But, of course, all this is more true of such hopes as are essentially ethical: of hopes that are, in part or whole, visions of the *new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* We need not inquire what the early Christians imagined by this, for we have our own vision of it to-day. The great prospect is not only bright in the print of our

Bibles: God has kindled it in the skies we look ahead to. God has made this future practical, not simply by promising it in the letter of this ancient Book, but by laying it on the conscience of living men as the chief end and expectation of religion. He has stung men with the sense of the need of it in the present awful condition of multitudes of our brothers, especially in the greater cities of the world. He has stirred within millions of the poor a hope of its coming, and has constrained thousands of all classes and creeds to make it their common labour. For that is how God always makes the future practical. When His poor give Him their hope for it; and His Church gives Him her prayers for it; and the strong and the wise give Him their toil for it—then the future is pledged, it is on its way, we shall live to see it. Religion has become social and altruistic as it has seldom been before. The Churches have been roused to feel that it is not enough for a man to save his own soul; but that as Christ had pity on the multitude; as He was not merely the physician of a few elect, but went about doing good and healing all, in body as well as soul; as He fed the hungry, and promised the earth to the

meek; and as He reigns now to fulfil these promises; so His followers dare not be satisfied with a narrower view, or a service less extended. Nor has any art, philosophy or department of politics failed to catch the enthusiasm—till, as you know, we cannot cross life by any of its avenues but the spirit of my text is in the air and its prospect fills the vista. There is, of course, a great deal of wild talk and of thinking which is only half conscious of what it would be after. All men have not caught the words of the New Song which God's spirit is striving to set upon the lips of this generation. But the masses are marching to the tune of it, and their faces are lifted to its hope. Therefore, if to-day we are awake, we cannot help being among those of whom the apostle says, that they look *for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

But this near hope of the world—what ought it to be for you and me individually? It ought to be conscience and it ought to be character. The ideals of a generation may sometimes have been as bright as they are to-day; they have never had in them more of stimulus and elevation for the individual. Young men, you are approaching

public life in an age, in whose hopes the motives to character are more pure and urgent than they have ever been. Here it is not possible to fall into those delusions, which in times past have so often followed upon the highest doctrines of religion and have dogged its purest intentions. Here are no religious promises capable of being usurped by the baser passions. Here is no peril of religion degenerating into a refined quality of selfishness. Here is no possibility of contentment with the merely negative virtues; nor of exhaustion in the work of political or ecclesiastical emancipation and reconstruction. But to-day the conscience of man feels more broadly than ever before that Love is the fulfilling of the Law; that service is the end of culture; and that the employment for the world of each faculty of our redeemed and sanctified manhood is, as it was to the prophets of the Old Testament, the one form of Divine election which is clear, practical and without mystery.

Nevertheless—for no form of religion can ever exist without the defects of its qualities—we, too, have our particular danger to guard against. The sphere of our religious hope is so extensive, so

universal, that we are all in danger of missing the personal in it. The very fact I have already mentioned, that this hope has enlisted and sways so many of the great forces of our time, especially in politics and science; that it has inspired so many theories and created so many organisations, makes it possible that in our study and our use of the life to which it has quickened all these, we may forget what it requires of our individual characters. We cannot help being engaged intellectually with those religious hopes of ours. Philosophy, theoretic and practical, is everywhere busy with them. We cannot help feeling those hopes emotionally. They come upon us in the art, the music and the poetry of our time. But let us see that we permit them to work out their moral effects upon ourselves. Read yourselves in their light, and let them be to you for a conscience and for an inspiration to character.

One knows, of course, that it is not all men who think such an application necessary; and that from some high places in our own generation—as in previous generations—a very different doctrine has been preached, a very different example has been shown. There have been, nearly at all times,

leaders of the people, labouring for their righteous hopes, whose private lives have nevertheless been unworthy; and the success of such men, and their apparent indispensableness for the moment to some high cause of reform, has led to the frequent saying, that private character has nothing to do with public ends. I am not now concerned with the question whether immoral men may not sometimes be of use to the common weal. But look at the effect upon themselves. Brothers, if a man have his eyes opened to a great ideal, if he so vividly behold a hope of righteousness as to be moved to speak and labour for it, and if he have put head and heart to some national service; and yet feel no stimulus to better his own character, but, on the contrary, continue to live in private a loose and sensual life, such a man's genius may be a useful tool in the hands of Providence—it is a difficult question!—but there is no doubt that he is fatal to himself. *What shall it profit a man*, even here, *if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?* To sin against such light; not to be steadied by so high a trust; not to be purer for the enthusiasm and loyalty of so many true hearts in so great a cause, is to squander some of the finest

possibilities of character and to sin against the Holy Ghost.

This sermon, however, is meant for you and me, my common brothers of the crowd, who, in addition to the evil examples which are shown from some high places, are also tempted by our obscurity to miss the vital connection that exists between the great hopes of our day and our individual characters. If you will open your hearts to these hopes, you must feel the power of sanctification which lies in them. For theirs is the attraction of the Living God, who draws and who disciplines men not only by the Bible, but by all the visions and enterprises of righteousness which have dawned and sprung in their own day. In the large public ideals and movements of our time feel His calling and His influence upon yourself: the opportunity He grants your soul to rise and purge herself of the ignoble and the selfish.

That is for your own sake, but for their sakes also these hopes appeal to you. Loyalty to them can only be achieved by loyalty to yourself. "Your character," they cry, "is necessary for our fulfilment." The new heavens and the new earth are to be created by no other means than the

redemption and the righteousness of the individual.

For, first of all, the social problem is just the sum of individual sins in the past, as I think Christ Himself implies in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The impurity of society; the entanglement of society in many evil habits and customs; the accumulation of wrong and suffering which confronts her statesmanship and her charity, represent, in a large proportion at least, just so many definite opportunities missed, so many single trusts betrayed, so many particular oversights by individuals of definite cases of pain and want by the side of their own paths through life (witness the Priest and Levite with the wounded man): just so many acts of cruelty, passion and cowardice. Till each of us fulfils his own duties to society and we all do our best with the cases of suffering by our own roadside, we shall be only multiplying the evils to meet which our social theories and charitable organisations are in these days being so confidently invented and constructed.

And again, we have come through a long period of intellectual and political experiments at Reform; we have organised and achieved a large amount of

careful observation and scientific arrangement of the social phenomena of our civilisation. We are beginning to see how far political theories, and how far education, can carry us in the reform of society. The result may be a disappointment of those expectations, which political reform and education so richly raised in the hearts of our fathers; but that only leaves us free to see how much more depends on the cultivation of individual morality; and how the ultimate factor in all social reform is character. This is the issue before the young men and women of to-day; and it presents itself more clear and imperative than to the conscience and experience of any previous generation. How are you to face it? Weakened by the self-indulgence and compromises of the years through which you are now passing? Or uncompromised, untainted, strong and ready to fight the evil which is without, because within you are pure, free and unafraid?

I close with another consideration. We have been looking at our text as if it were only a hope. But it is more: it is a promise. We look for new heavens and a new earth, *according to His promises*, as one reading runs. And of these two

especially are conspicuous. The first is a command, and naturally so; for no promise can have righteousness for its object, and not speak also in the imperative mood. Conversely, conscience is itself a Promise. The Word of God, whether within our hearts, or on the page of Scripture, never commands without also creating the power to fulfil the command. He who said *Let there be Light, and there was Light*, cannot say *Thou shalt* to a man, without in the very commandment starting within him at least the beginning of a sense of power to fulfil it. With God to command is to promise, and to promise is to create. Righteousness is the one certainty in our future, because it is the Divine obligation in our present. And if the first great promise of God be thus a Command, the second is a Guarantee. It lies in the life of His Son Jesus Christ, in whom we have seen, as in our flesh and against our temptations, righteousness already perfect and victorious over evil. It is here that Christianity distinguishes itself from Optimism, which is only a temper without either conscience or experience. Mere Optimism has no fear of God upon it, that springs from the imperative obligation of His commandments; no

discipline resulting from that; no faith in the creative power of the divine command; and above all, no memory of the great fact, that God's will has been fully revealed and achieved in the character and work of Christ.

Brethren, whether the social ideals of our age work themselves into fact or not, there is no doubt —by the God we believe in, by the conscience He has set in us, by the life and death of Jesus Christ, His Son—that a perfect righteousness is the ultimate future of human experience. Here or across the grave there is being prepared for us all the Kingdom of God. That is certain, and we are immortal. Some day we shall be brought face to face with it, and have to realise definitely our relation to it. But the awfulness of such an hour will not consist in this, that the thing we then meet shall be strange and novel to us; but rather in this, that it shall not be new, and that it shall not be strange. The Kingdom of God is certain, and we are immortal; but none of us is going to meet it for the first time. The Kingdom has already come. In Jesus Christ we have understood it, we have owned its obligation, we have felt its full influence. What else can be displayed in the

new heavens and the new earth than the righteousness revealed in Him: the duty, the opportunity, the power to fulfil, which He is now affording! Their obligation lies in this, that they are not merely the brightest possibility in our future, but the most urgent certainty upon our present. They have proved themselves real in human history; they have proved themselves real in our individual experience; and to-day they present themselves afresh with all the power of God upon them to win and to redeem and to rebuild our fallen characters. That is why we must meet them again, and meet Him in whom they are manifest. For as men shall be judged by the highest they have known of holiness, and the strongest they have felt of love, and the widest they have seen of moral opportunity, so must it certainly be that Christ shall stand as their Judge.

Do we, therefore, wonder that the Apostle inserts in our text, as he calls us to the hopes of righteousness, a phrase I have not yet touched—*that ye may be found of Him in peace.* How much there remains to be done behind our present, and within our hearts, before we can meet these hopes in peace, look them in the face, and say—

"They are mine, and I am free to work with them and for them." May God's spirit so stir penitence within us; and the assurance of that forgiveness which our Lord lived and died to win for us; and the faith that He can render even the worst and most stunted of us worthy of those hopes—that we may indeed make them our own, and in all freedom and fearlessness press on to their fulfilment for ourselves and our race.

VIII

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? Jesus made answer and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, which both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead.—Luke x. 29 ff.

THIS story starts from a question of Eternal Life, intended to be controversial, and it closes with such practical matters as the finding of a wounded man by the road-side, oil, wine, an ass, and twopence paid at an inn. It begins, I say, with a question about Eternal Life and ends with the payment of twopence. Along which line lies much of its significance for us.

A Lawyer—not in our modern sense of the term, but an expert in religious law, a Divine as much as a Lawyer—asked our Lord two questions, both of which were, in themselves, lawful and urgent.

To begin with, he said: *Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* In reply, Jesus asked him what he found in that Law, of which he was a master; and the Lawyer quoted the same verses, in which on another occasion Jesus summed up the whole Law. Whereupon our Lord would have dismissed His questioner to the practical fulfilment of them. *This do and thou shalt live.* The Lawyer, however, had still to clear himself of the appearance of having asked a needless question; and, besides, he had not reached the real end for which he had come. *And*—there is an emphasis on this word, as if to urge a vital connection between the first and the second question—*And, who is my neighbour?* This, too, was in itself a serious request. It was a running controversy in the schools, a daily problem of conduct to scrupulous men. What persons and characters may I frequent? To whom do I owe the services commanded by the Law? But the Lawyer did not set the question for either its academic or its practical interest. The narrative says, he was *tempting* our Lord: tempting Him into controversy with the view of getting Him to say something at variance with the letter of the Law and

with orthodox opinion. Jesus befriended and blessed all kinds of character, which were beyond the legal definition of *neighbours*; and the Lawyer hoped to entrap Him into a statement in conflict with that definition. Our Lord ignored the attempt upon Himself, and instead of answering the question dogmatically, told a story. It boldly stormed every prejudice of His enemy, for its hero was one whom he considered an outcast, and its delinquents were a Priest and a Levite, two of the pillars of his system. But it reached his heart, enlisted his sympathy and commanded his imitation. The Lawyer was affronted, but the Man was won.

The Lawyer asked for a definition; Christ replied by describing a situation.

Observe how, to begin with, our Lord flings the whole subject out of the atmosphere in which the lawyers of the time were discussing it. For most of them its interests were purely doctrinal and academic; even to those of a tender conscience, to whom it was practical, the details of conduct which it raised were often petty and formal. Stirring up of abstract ideas, bandying of questions of food and trade, and of touching the

garments of unclean persons; the air thick with the beating of dead men's opinions and the defining of trifles into dust: nothing concrete or alive, save the sharp tempers of the debaters which, like the malice of this questioner, flashed as swords through smoke.

Out of all that, Christ flings the subject into real life. Where does it alight? It alights upon one of the most dangerous roads in Palestine; and one of the best-known. The men of our Lord's audience must have trodden this as pilgrims and known that they would tread it again; when the voices, so brave for argument in the Temple-courts and synagogues, would sink to whispers as the speakers hurried on, with robbery and wounds possible at every corner. We may be sure that the well-known dangers which our Lord introduced, the rough and bleeding facts, would daunt every pedant or malicious thought His hearers had about the topic, and purge their sympathies for what was to follow. It is one of those things which our Lord did with creative power: one of those points, which we scarcely notice in our careless reading, but at which He changes the whole atmosphere of the subject; and lo! our hearts are changed with it.

We all know how easily the conscience and sympathy, which God has given us for the help of the needy, may be exhausted by a score of plausible pre-occupations long before we get in sight of the work itself. And we cannot hide from our minds that in this respect religion itself may become a danger, and we be so busy with its definition and arrangement as to have no strength left for the duties which religion is meant to inspire. Surely this is what Christ felt had happened to the Divine and all his class; surely this was what He sought to change when He flung the subject free of religious associations and caused it to alight where it did.

Before we take up the characters of the story, let us look a little longer at the scene, which our Lord has chosen for His example of neighbourliness. This is not the home, nor the church, nor the market, nor the battlefield, nor any stage on which is brought to bear either social affection or discipline, or patriotism, or the opinion of those whom we esteem. It is the Road: the lonely, uninspiring, commonplace Road, which spells weariness, danger and the falling night; where man has none of the motives that keep him

unselfish at home or on the accustomed theatre of his work. "Travel," say many moralists, "Travel with a man if you wish to find out his character." So also Christ presented His test of philanthropy amid the conditions of a journey. Tempted in all points as we are, His feet had trod the weary ways of this earth, and His heart knew how, though ready of help where discipline and loved faces draw it forth, we often become so callous and irresponsible when we go on a journey. It is a strange commentary on this parable, that none are more apt to be selfish, irritable and indifferent to suffering by the roadside than pilgrims of all creeds. The story of religious pilgrimage is a sordid and a cruel story: there is no more sullied page in human history. Now Jesus, the Wayfarer, was speaking to a people of pilgrims. But for us His lesson is wider. It is this: how much of the work and virtue God demands of us has to be done apart from all those customary rewards and inspirations, on which, in our selfishness and vanity, we too much depend. This is heroism—to do our work without audience or stimulus, where all the bias and hang of the heart is the other way. May those who have to travel through life amid such condi-

tions, with few or no natural aids to virtue, weary, alone, without any provocations to enthusiasm, remember that theirs are the high places of the field. Theirs are the posts and the ways on which our Lord has His eye, and among them it is that the Master seeks for His ideals of service.

Upon this Road what a fortuitous concourse of persons our Lord exhibits to us! A half-dead man, a Priest, a Levite, and a journeying Samaritan. No possible "social contract" could have brought them together; neither kinship nor patriotism nor a common faith. See how Christ emphasises that it was *by chance* they came. The poor man *fell* among robbers. *By chance*, came down a Priest that way. *And likewise* a Levite. And a certain Samaritan, *as he journeyed*, came where he was.

What an explosion there is here of all formulas of neighbourliness and charity! *Who is my neighbour?* asks the Lawyer, expecting a definition. I cannot tell you, Christ replies, till circumstances create him for you. You want a dogmatic exposition of a neighbour, either to use it for controversy, or to have an ideal, with which you may warm your heart; or to create a class and close

corporation for yourself. But I am come to tell you that only facts will reveal your neighbour, and your duty to him; and woe to you, if, pre-occupied like Priest and Levite with theories of what a neighbour should be, you leave the fact alone and pass by on the other side.

It is thus that the parable most keenly comes home to ourselves. Its purpose is not so much to create charitable feelings in our heart, or to give us for the first time a conscience of duty towards our fellow men; as to warn us how easily that feeling and conscience may be wasted by plausible interests, some of which plead the very name of religion. It is to show us how much of our charity beats the air, how little treads the solid earth. It is to rouse us from conventionality and routine; to bring us to face facts; and to add, to our love, commonsense, originality, courage.

There are three things which are at fault in our philanthropy.

First of all, many of us have a bias off the practical. Reasoning costs so little, and talking costs so little—especially when they are slack and slovenly—that we launch upon them, and being

readily under way with them, we are prone to get into the habit of regarding all calls to help as interruptions. With some religious people the temper grows so far as to make them timid about hard, momentous facts found lying by their road side; so that they swerve, as a horse swerves, when they come across them. In the last twenty years, the Christian Churches have wonderfully thrown off this temper; but it is useless to deny that large portions of their membership are still affected by it; and it is needful to remind ourselves, that, however faithful we be to the truths of our religion and the routine of its worship, we are just as apt to shy at facts suddenly emergent on the road side as the Priest and Levite were. Just because we are religious people we have to be on our guard against this temper. Ask God not only for obedience and fidelity, but for courage and inventiveness. For the want of these it is that the real needs of men are to-day so often passed by.

Secondly, we are all somewhat prone to indulgence in the ideal. And this is the sin not only of religious people; but of other humanitarians among us as well. It is not only Christians who are tempted to sun themselves in the

light of Heaven while neglecting the things that lie starved in the shadows of earth. Secularists are quite as susceptible to so stupid a selfishness. In our time there are some well-meaning persons who are satisfied with clear ideas, or clever formulas on the subject of philanthropy; who never get beyond the successful intellectual effort, or the satisfaction of clear feeling. One notices it with Positivists and secular Socialists, just as much as with religious formalists and persons given over to "other worldliness." Sensitive and refined hearts, they welcome each new prospect of righteousness and the commonweal, opened in philosophy or literature. Week by week they listen with satisfaction to stirring sermons, or month by month cut up their magazines and hug themselves in the light of some new aspect of the social ideal. But they never take up their duty by their own road side. Now, it is grand to look forward and see the heavens brighten with the dawn of a new day; but there never yet was light upon the sky which was not meant to illuminate the ground about our feet, and show each of us his bit of work waiting for him there.

Thirdly, there is much routine, and there are many conventions, to be obstinately resisted and overcome before we can do our charitable duties. No general principles can be laid down; each of us must examine and judge for himself. But it is only too evident that there exist many social fashions, such as the purely formal visits which are deemed imperative among certain classes, extravagant feasting, flocking upon certain lines of insipid or of morbid recreation, even the support of some political and social institutions; which exhaust the strength, the money and the time that are needed for the remedy of real evils. Nor can any of us forget how the mere fear of doing something uncommon has often stayed our hands and crushed our rising hearts in a way, which has left us feeling mean and cowardly for many a day after; but which, if persisted in, renders us in time cruelly callous. Perhaps there are no feelings more easy for many of us to enter into than those of the Priest, when his body turned the first imperceptible angle to the other side of the road, and he found himself there almost before he knew he had left that on which his duty lay. Above all, let not any of us believe that we have

exhausted our debts to our fellow men by the performance of our religious routine, or of the charitable fashions of the day. People of amiable temper, and of benevolent intentions, spend their whole lives in passing by their duty and other men's needs. God has given you the hearts you have, and has daily filled them with the means of grace, for some higher purpose than giving subscriptions. "Man," says John Calvin upon this parable, "was made for the use of man." And you and I have not done our duty, and dare not appear before the Man, our Judge, who gave us this Parable, if we have not, like its hero, brought our full manhood into the personal service of the needy and the suffering about us.

Do you notice how Christ repeats the words, *he passed by*. So many of us go on our way, occupied with self, paying our tolls to the customary churches and charities, and holding our manhood aloof. And thus the wrongs of the world are neglected and men suffer alone, and characters are discouraged, and lives drift past all chance of recovery, and the social problem waxes to desperation; because each of us singly

will not render to the wants by his road side that personal love and attention which they require.

It cannot remain unnoticed by us that the charity which our Lord holds up to our imitation is that of the individual heart; and that He says nothing of what is so necessary in our day: the full discussion of philanthropic methods and the reasonable discipline of charity. Nor does He say a word of the duty of the State with regard to it. Charity organisation is of cardinal importance; otherwise, like water when it is not confined and guided by artificial means, the purest love and the most liberal intentions must grow malarious and a menace to the health of the community. But what Christ does in this Parable is to get behind all those institutions and organisations, on which the health and the efficiency of charity depend, to that spring or fountain without which they are vain and useless: the charitable genius of the individual. Here is the illustration of what He came to earth to teach—that, after all, the ultimate source of everything good and great in the world is character and heart; the love that the individual has; his vigilance, his courage, his

inventiveness. And even our charity-organisations need that lesson.

So let us turn, in conclusion, to the Good Samaritan himself.

We have seen that Christ emphasises that His hero came not of purpose, but that as *he journeyed* on some other pursuit, he saw this wounded man and helped him. He is no knight errant riding some high horse of chivalry or adventure. He is probably a plain commercial traveller: a man on business, riding his own ass. He uses such skill and means as he has with him, binding up the wounds, drawing from his private supplies of oil and wine, setting the victim on his own beast and paying twopence for him. But he resolves also to stand by his patient and see him through his evil case. *Take care of him*, he says to the innkeeper, *and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.*

It is, of course, a double lesson: on the exceeding easiness of doing good, and on the duty of doing it thoroughly.

Love and courage work with whatever is to their hand; and men are helped not by the strength of our talents, or the richness of our alms,

but by the love and energy we stir up in ourselves and put at their disposal. Damaged, needy, lonely lives lie by every road side; but they are most within reach of the poor and humble. Wealth and intellectual eminence are not always aids to that personal service of one heart by another in which philanthropy consists. Be not, therefore, discouraged by your humble capacities; but know that their very lowliness gives you opportunities of service denied to the stronger and more wealthy.

But stand by those whom you help till you see them through. Else it were almost better you never touched them. Of fitful and inadequate relief a witty Frenchman has said, that it creates one-half of the misery it relieves, but cannot relieve one-half of the misery it creates.

But the Parable, some have said, does not tell us how to get the heart which was in this good Samaritan. All it shows us is a man whose heart and conscience were on the spot; who did his duty, where others, more religiously equipped, failed in theirs. The man was in religion a poor Samaritan, with but a part of the Bible—nothing more than the Pentateuch; a half-Pagan,

of whom Christ Himself said: *Ye know not what ye worship, salvation is of the Jews.* Where then did he get this heart, which the Lord sets up as our example? Did it, too, like so much in the Parable, come down that road *by chance?* Or are we to draw the lesson—enforced by many to-day—that religion is not at all necessary for philanthropy, and that we are to fall back upon the unsophisticated human affections when we want grace and motive to make us helpers of men?

To those who talk thus, let us reply: Who then created the Good Samaritan? Who was his original? We must look from the hero, to the Maker of the Parable. Our fathers used to see Christ in the Good Samaritan to the extent of making the whole story an allegory of our Lord's saving work for men. You remember the details. The man who fell among robbers was any sinner in the misery of his sins. Priest and Levite were the institutions of the Old Testament—Law and Prophecy passing helplessly by. Christ was the Good Samaritan. The oil and wine were the Sacraments; the Inn was the Church; the promise was that of Christ's prevailing grace. It was overdone, of course, but it had this truth, that

there was nothing in the Parable which did not come from Christ Himself. The Good Samaritan is the product neither of the Pentateuch nor of the "unsophisticated human affections," but of the mind of Jesus. And it is that mind which we must seek for ourselves if we would share the love, the courage, the sanity and effectiveness of the hero it has created. These qualities show their brightest example in Christ Himself; in His attitude towards men; in the methods of His ministry, and in the Spirit of His Cross. From no other source can we draw them so fully as from our own experience of the descent of His Love upon our helplessness, and of His power to save and to heal. Look, I say, to the Author of the Parable. He, who conceived the Good Samaritan as a figure in a tale, has created and still creates, in real life, characters and services as noble as his.

IX

TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH

To him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

And he that overcometh and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations. . . . And I will give him the morning star.

He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels.

He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name.

He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne.

—Revelation ii. 7, 11, 17, 26, 28; iii. 5, 12, 21.

HE who comes to his fellow-men with such promises as these feels himself, as he delivers them, possessed of a great certainty. He has the assurance that every man to whom he utters such a promise needs it, knows what it means, and knows that it is meant for him. Not one of us who has ears to hear these words but has an experience behind to understand them, a conscience that feels their obligation, and a sense of danger that must welcome their high, triumphant tone. What struggle do you struggle with, as I with mine? What foes do you sharpen conscience upon—sharpen conscience upon or break its edge? Let these things be known to ourselves and God. The rest is enough. We are all soldiers in the same war, and our Lord's sevenfold promise comes to each of us.

That is the reason why we should take not only one but all the seven promises together. A great part of the force of their appeal lies in the constancy and impartiality with which it is made

to individuals of such various moral circumstance and opportunity. Here are seven Churches in seven strongly distinguished towns. In some the general life is strenuous and progressive. In others there is no advance on the main issues, but, at least, purity, a humble ministry in little things and patience. Others are delinquent or asleep. Others are tolerant of even horrid vice. The climate of one is persecution, of another as fatal luxury. Here the danger is material wealth, there an intellectual license which frankly denies the moral law. But no matter what be the environment, atmosphere and temptations of these seven communities, when all is admitted and allowed for by Him who searches the heart, His call comes impartially to every individual of them: that for him everything shall turn on his own ethical warfare and victory. All had not the same moral opportunity. Which of us would not rather have belonged to the Church of Philadelphia than to that of Laodicea? A man must more easily have held his soul in the troubled, dying congregation of Smyrna, where all the enemies were outside, than in the great, cold church of Sardis, which had the name to live, but was really dead. Yet He who

knew the greatly differing chances of each member, and describes them, adds that, irrespective of them all, the individual will be judged by the warfare and issue of His own faith and conscience. *To him that overcometh! To him that overcometh!* The moral obligation and responsibility of the individual could not be more powerfully impressed upon our minds than by this high, clear call, repeated seven times across that awful difference of advantage and opportunity.

And it is still the same as it was then. The persecutions are impossible, the names and forms of the heresies so dead, that we can hardly understand what some of them taught. But putting such ancient things aside, the rest of the picture is of to-day and of ourselves. Here are weariness and the loss of early enthusiasm; a few virtues kept shining on the face of a general dilapidation. There is a grinding poverty with no material hope about it. Or there are brave works in lonely ways, what the letter to Ephesus describes as *toil and patience;* but with no sense of influence upon the great human issues: the causes, on which Christ promised His people the victory over the world. Or there are the bulk and frankness of certain evils;

their tyranny on public opinion; and, on the other side, the nerveless tolerance of sin and indifference to suffering on the part of those who should be most forward to combat and to heal. Or there is the drab of so much of our Christianity; the commonplace or even shabbiness of character that clothes it: in the great, grey crowds only a few who walk in white garments, unselfish and ardent. But above and through these details, are we not most haunted by the presence of an awful inequality of moral advantage: the terrible chance, which appears to reign in a sphere in which chance ought, to our thinking, to be impossible: the irresistible bias to evil, which from birth impedes millions of characters?

Indeed, in some respects this is worse to us than it was within that single Roman province to which the Seven Churches belonged. We have, at least, three great aggravations of the evil.

Some of those Churches were troubled by a licentious sect proclaiming liberty from the moral law. But in place of such a narrow faction, we are exposed to a pervasive tendency of thought with the same corrupt intentions. As Dr. Martineau put it: "There is a remarkable intellectual subtlety

engaged now-a-days in perplexing men's moral convictions." It is not the relaxation of this or that doctrine, but the loosening of moral faith, the fluctuating vision of the boundary between right and wrong; the clever and mischievous readiness to argue for any line of conduct, irrespective of its goodness; and the growing curiosity to describe and explain immoral phenomena, which appears, in the interest of art, to absorb all sense of duty in the observer to pass judgment upon them. Altogether we see the same antinomianism as of old, but instead of presenting itself in the ridiculous excesses of a fanatical coterie, it assumes the aspect of an æsthetic or philosophic temper, and insinuates its scepticism into the very shrine of reason.

Then again, as we all know, certain misinterpretations of science are replacing in the popular mind the moral convictions of religion; and among other things the old instinct of the responsibility of the individual for his character—an instinct which often survived in the past even where faith in God and in a future life had been weakened—is disappearing before impressions of the individual's moral helplessness under the influence of past

generations and of the state of society about him. The doctrine of moral heredity is spreading. But it is not enough to tell the crowd that the wholesale deductions which they have assumed from the observations of science are unfounded, and indeed disclaimed by science itself, which is not yet sure of the facts of heredity, and by no means shuts up the individual to a moral fate determined for him by the habits of his ancestors. We have to face a much more terrible foe to the sense of individual responsibility than the influence of scientific teaching about heredity. This is the practical experience of great masses of our people. The degrading environment which portions of our population inhabit; the rigour of their poverty; some of the economic conditions imposed upon their toil; the early familiarity with vice on the part of a proportion of the children of our great cities; the temptations to drunkenness and other sins, often so abounding that any growth of character among them may be said to be impossible —all these form conditions extremely favourable to the spread of moral fatalism. We all know how the study of the physical universe, apart from the ethical interests and sympathies at work upon

it, may depress the moral faith of even the strongest of intellects. But let us also remember, that in the case of the far weaker minds of the common people, such an infection, caught by some of them from above, is enforced day by day by social and economic experiences, from which moral freedom and moral hope often appear to have utterly vanished.

Yet, thirdly, it is not only in sceptical minds, nor only among the more servile conditions of our social life that the individual's sense of his duty and of his power to work out his salvation is disappearing. There is also a dangerous slackening of this sense among people who would not for anything give up religion, and whose circumstances are not hard. A great many persons now-a-days accept the social teaching and practice of Christianity, while ignoring on the one hand the religious facts from which these have derived most of their influence over the human mind, and on the other the personal experiment and discipline by which individuals have assimilated the meaning of these facts, and have thereby become agents in the regeneration of society. Such facile minds accept the liberties, the charities, the domestic

cleanness and security which they heartily acknowledge only Christianity could have forced on a reluctant world. But they appear to deem it no longer necessary for themselves to undergo the personal discipline—the penitence, the conversion, the prayer, the moral struggles—by which alone she effected that result. Are we not all tempted to this? The most of us religious people are the easy heirs from our fathers of habits of life, of affections, and of mental attitudes, which we are apt to think reproduce themselves from generation to generation. And so we let them run, and feel no need, for our own wills and hearts, of that self-examination and devotion, through which our fathers won the power to create the fashion and tradition of them.

Thus, you see, over all varieties of moral opportunity and advantage which prevail in the present day, alike at both extremes of our social life, there is a great slackening, to say the least, of the sense of personal religious responsibility. Everywhere we need this sevenfold call of Christ—*Unto him that overcometh!* For it is just with us as with these seven Asian Churches. Whether we have great ethical advantages, or whether by our

social conditions we are deprived of these, our besetting danger is to forget the duty and the power of character that lies with each of us. We ignore the fact that the progress of the race, as well as of ourselves, depends upon the thoroughness with which each of us takes up and pursues his individual warfare.

The obligation to this is supreme, and not analysable. It comes from conscience, and it comes from Christ. History is the proof of it; it is vindicated by human experience; it is explained and becomes clear by obedience. Hesitate before this duty, be content with questioning it, and you will never penetrate its secret. But accept the call, act upon it, and you understand it and experience its reality. For the truth of it is proved to you by this, that to obey gives you a new conscience and braces every working nerve you have; that if you were asleep it makes you ashamed, if you were in despair it lifts you to hope.

This is, indeed, what the richness and variety of the seven promises lay before us. I do not propose to follow them in detail. Let us be satisfied with a few of their contents.

The most evident and often-repeated element of

these promises is the gift of life—here and hereafter. *To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life; the hidden manna; a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, authority over the nations, the morning star, the name of my God and my own new name—to him that overcometh.* And it is eternal: *He shall not be hurt of the second death; I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life; I will give him to sit down with me on my throne.* Here is life in all its range and detail: in all its clear meaning and wide power: life nourished here from stage to stage by the daily manna, life through all eternity.

But how hard a promise it is: leaving all with ourselves! Christ does not say here—I give thee life that thou mayest overcome. But overcome and the life will be thine. The responsibility, the start, the strain He leaves upon our own wills; even as His apostle intends, where he says, not accept the faith, but *fight the good fight of faith.* Yes it is stern; but how true to our experience. For didst thou ever pass through a temptation in which thou didst not feel: Here even God cannot go before me, nor stand instead of me. Otherwise

it were not worth the name of temptation; it were not in any wise *thy* temptation. For who is it that is to be tempted, tested, put to proof and trial? Is it God or Christ? It is thou, thyself. But precisely as thou awakest to this; precisely as the loneliness and rigour of such an experience come home to thee, God has begun to fulfil His promise of life. For it is in the bare realisation of thyself —and all the more, let me say, if it even come upon thee for the moment without any religious mitigation of its solitude and its pain—it is in this very moment, of lonely responsibility and unmitigated strain, that life begins.

It is the necessity and prerogative of our manhood that in its moral conflicts, God who has assuredly called us and is ready to help us, must wait for a decision and victory which shall be our own. However clear His call—and all our salvation starts from that—however near His help; *we* have got to decide, *we* have got to overcome. So was it with the great prophets long ago. Isaiah received his commission through a question —*Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?*— which waited for an answer from himself. Jeremiah, conscious of his fluid temper and poor

gifts, and shrinking from the office to which he was summoned, heard the words—*Be not dismayed lest I make thee dismayed before them.* Terrible words leaving so much with himself! And Ezekiel, prostrate before the rush of life and power which filled his vision of the Universe, heard the call—*Son of Man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee.* God who has called us, waits upon the start of our effort; respecting, nay proving to us, the freedom of the soul He has created in His own image. Do not suppose this is to take away the spring of our salvation from Himself and to start it within man. For this bare realisation of our freedom and our duty is just the beginning, the necessary beginning, of His gift of life to us: and could have come to us in no other way.

And so, after the start, throughout the whole of our moral growth. Quietists quote our Lord's text—*Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin,*—as if this were a direction for our inward life, and that, therefore, all our duty were to get into the proper conditions for growing, while He who is His people's sun and shield shelters and ripens us.

They forget that our Lord was talking of our physical life, our growth in stature, and our labour for food and raiment, but not of the training of our will and our decision between right and wrong. Here let Himself be our example, whose whole life on earth was a warfare with the powers of evil; who found its crises and its agonies in the hours when He was alone with the Father; *who in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears . . . and was heard in that He feared.* Him let us follow who was tempted in all things like as we are, till by feeling our fellowship with Him in agony and the awful difficulty of doing the Father's will, we shall also share His faith that we have got this conflict to endure just because we can bear it, just because of our freedom, and just in order to realise that we are alive. *As I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on His throne.*

Christ's promise, however, is fulfilled to us not only in the blast and crisis of the storm by this primary sense of an individuality, which He honours us by calling as distinct as His own; but by further gifts of all that makes the life of a man fresh, confident and happy. Men yield to sin for

the sake of life: for richer food, and a faster pulse; for power to outrace conscience and rise above circumstance; for a deeper joy; for a wider and more varied knowledge; for visions of beauty and draughts of power. O, my brothers, let us understand that when life comes this way, it comes but in drops, and only for moments; passing from us as swiftly as it came, and leaving our minds and wills to tremble before duty or disaster. Such life is not food, but a false stimulus: betraying us just when we most need the strength which it pretended. But the life which those enjoy who overcome is, as Christ calls it, a *manna*, given daily and unfailing. After every temptation conquered, after every self-indulgence refused, after every duty accepted and patiently performed, we do feel this life, in a hundred fresh impulses of moral vigour and hopefulness. He who conquers is a new man—fresh, elastic, confident. The skies are bright above him, and his heart is clear within. There is given to him an enjoyment of God's world denied to other men; and at the same time a power of patience with things that are evil, for he has already conquered these in himself, and knows that their day is determined. What a generous trust

in others our victories over ourselves give us! What an eye for the good that is in them! What a power of encouraging that good! While about us is the atmosphere of peace which springs from the faith that God reigns! *I will give him the Morning Star.*

If such elements of life be given daily, so that by them we grow from one power of character and one stage of joy to another; they also carry with them the assurance of eternity. This is not an easy assurance, when you seek to present the intellectual grounds for it. The philosophy of it is by no means clear. But I am speaking of those instincts of immortality which spring from the conquest of evil. Nothing can rob a man of that sense of his individuality which comes upon him as he humbly passes, conscious of his union with Christ in God, from a moral victory. He knows what Christ means by the words, *I will give him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne.* If there are moments, in which it is granted to our flesh to feel itself the tabernacle of an eternal Spirit, they come after the conquest of temptation.

Life, then, is most deeply felt, and most richly enjoyed, by him who has overcome. But it is just another way of stating the same fact to say that by him also it is most clearly read and understood. To the victor our Lord does not promise a famous life, whose story all the world shall read; nor even one that his own fellows shall understand, but what is far better, a life whose meaning and whose title shall be very legible to himself. *I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.* When others by declining the moral battle or yielding to self-indulgence shall inevitably forfeit not only the capacity for long views and consistent purpose in life, but also most of their interest in life's present engagements and duties; his mental interest in things about him, and in the experiences which happen to him; the freshness of his mind to the daily routine; his powers of judgment and moral criticism; his appreciation of the order and legibleness of his own past; his faith in the Wisdom which directs him; his persuasion that he is in God's love and guidance —shall constantly increase.

Is all this selfish? By no means: there is

no other course of conduct by which we can do more good to the race. In these days when schemes of social service and social organisation are being multiplied, and rightly multiplied, there is danger of our forgetting the essential need of personal character trained in the Christian discipline and rich with the fruits of personal experience of the grace of God and the conquest of evil. *To him that overcometh, to him will I give authority over nations.* What kind of authority our Lord means we may understand from his other words: *Whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant, and whosoever would be first among you shall be your slave: even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.* It was by overcoming that Jesus won His power of service; and as the Master so shall His disciples be.

Such a character, as these His seven promises describe, is at once the most adequate inspiration for social service, and the most infectious power for good in the lives of others.

X

ESAU

Lest there be any . . . profane person, as Esau, who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright.—HEBREWS xii. 16.

IN all Scripture there are few characters more profitable for our study than the elder son of Isaac and Rebekah. The composite form in which his story has reached us was not finished for hundreds of years after the era to which he belonged. And, it may be, those are right who assert that there have been painted into the portrait of the man features derived from the probable etymologies of the names of his descendants—for Edom may mean *red;* Esau and Seir (the land he inhabited) may mean *hairy*—and that his character is, in part, the reflection of the qualities which his descendants developed in opposition to Israel.

The two nations, Edom and Israel, obviously sprang from a common stock; and they were

neighbours. Yet in the lands they occupied, in the pursuits they followed, and in the national tempers they developed, they offered to each other a remarkable contrast. Early Israel were shepherds: *plain men*, that is *quiet* and *peaceable*, *dwelling in tents;* but far-sighted, patient and subtle: natural qualities which, under the influence of the Revelation given to them, developed into the most extraordinary genius for religion which any nation has ever exhibited. The Edomites, on the other hand, were at first little more than hunters and warriors, of an impulsive and desperate temper—a temper, like their land, full of precipices, and bare, too, of the more spiritual elements of character. They had their gods and their high places, of course; but their religion is singular among those of the peoples of Syria in exerting almost no fascination on Israel's mind. The Edomites do not appear to have had any faculty in that direction. The few personages they gave to history, among whom the Herods are conspicuous, were coarse, unscrupulous, ruthless, without any interest in religion, except what was dictated by policy. No better word could describe this people than *profane*.

Yet the parallel between Esau and the nation he founded is far from perfect. Some of their qualities do not appear in his portrait: their commercial gifts, the worldly *wisdom* for which they were famed, and that brazen pitilessness which the prophets and psalmists, from many centuries, unanimously attributed to them. The Esau of our story is a facile character, simple and placable. Such a difference is hardly explained by the theory, that those notorious qualities of the Edomites were not thrust upon the experience of Israel till after the composition of Esau's picture; but rather by the fact that his story as it stands is not the reflection, always more or less vague, of the surface of a nation; but the record, keener, deeper and more tragic, of the character and experience of an individual. In this lies its value for ourselves. Whether we look at his circumstances, or his chances, or his temper, or the line along which the tragedy of his life is drawn, we find with Esau more that resembles the pitiful facts and solemn possibilities of our own experience than we do with almost any other character in either of the Testaments. Here is a man who was not an insane or monstrous sinner—a Lucifer falling from

heaven—but who came to sin in the common, human way; by birth into it, by the sins of others as well as his own, by every-day and sordid temptations, by carelessness and the sudden surprise of neglected passions. Esau is not a repulsive but an attractive man; and we know that if we are to learn from any character our love must be awake, and take her share in the task. There is everything to engage us in the study of him. The mystery which shrouds all human sin, our own experience of temptation, the regret we feel for so wronged and genial a nature—may these only serve to make more clear to us the central want and blame of his life. For this may be our own.

First, then, Esau was sinned against from his birth. The problems of heredity and of a stress of temptation, for which he was not to blame, appear in his case from the first. His father and mother were responsible for much of the character of their son. It is strange that in the marriage service of the Church of England, the example of Isaac and Rebekah should be invoked for every

new husband and wife. Isaac's and Rebekah's life was the spoiling of one of the most beautiful idylls ever opened on this earth of ours. Their love began in a romance, and ended in vulgarity. It began with the most honourable plighting of troth, and it ended in the most sordid querulousness and falsehood. That can only have been, because from the first, with all its grace and wonder, the fear of God was not present; because with the romance there was no religion, and with the giving of the one heart to the other there was no surrender of both to God. It was very picturesque for a man to come over the horizon on a camel, to surprise this girl at her domestic service, and to carry her off so quickly to a home of her own. But what availed it all, if she did not feel that God Himself had come with His messenger, and did not go forth as in God's guidance? Of course, it thrilled a girl's heart to be told how she had been dreamt of and sought for so far away. But if, with the pride of such a moment, there was mixed no awe, no conscience, no strife to be worthy of it; then disillusion was sure to follow. The nemesis of picturesqueness without truth is sordidness; the nemesis of romance without religion is vulgarity.

And vulgarity and sordidness are the prevailing aspects of Isaac's and Rebekah's wedded life. We see a divided house; the father and older son on one side, the mother and younger son on the other; the father unable to bless his children till he has enjoyed a favourite dish; the mother taking advantage of her husband's blindness to cheat him and her older son, and training the younger to a selfish and cruel dissimulation. What is Rebekah? The girl, whose pure heart leapt at the stranger's story of love, is become the exaggerating, lying old woman. It is the result of living on mere feeling. No matter how pure a boy's and a girl's hearts may be, no matter how honourable the love that makes them leap—if the pride of it and the sweetness of it be all they feel, disillusion and degeneracy are certainly ahead. It is not the wonder nor the passion of a love that will save it: but the religion that is in it, the conscience, the awe.

Of such a mother Esau was born. He never showed her falseness, but he had all her irreligion and all her haste, and he proved it with his man's strength. In her it had been an easy sense of the meaning and consequences of sin;[1] a facile

[1] Genesis xxvii. 44, 45.

unscrupulousness about other people's rights, even when these other people were her husband and her son—in short, a want of the sense of God and His government of life. But although it was his own rights of which Esau was forgetful, the unscrupulousness which he showed was the same: the same forgetfulness of God and His restraint; the same disregard of consequences. And they ruined him. A vice will vary as it wanders from one generation into another, and will often take a more fatal form. We may never give our children the example of passionate indulgence, we may never be guilty of deeds so offensive as Rebekah's—prudence or timidity may keep us from these—but if we are hasty, if we are wanting in self-control in little temptations; or if, while ostensibly religious, we be insincere; or have no sense of the awfulness of sin and of its certain effects; or if we tamper with the truth or compromise our consciences, while outwardly respectable and regular in life—we are infecting our children with just that evil which in them may break out to violent and ruinous extremes. It is not drunken or licentious parents who are most dangerous to the generation that follows; for by their excesses they very often

create a reaction in their children. It is careless parents, shifty and insincere parents, parents with no impressive sense of the reality of God and His government, or of the natural persistence and irremediableness of sin.

Our text calls Esau *a profane person.* The Greek word means literally that which *may be trodden;* which is unfenced and open to the feet of all. It was applied to ground outside sacred enclosures and temples: ground that was common and public. *Profane*—that which is in front of the fane or temple—is, therefore, its adequate translation.

Such a home Rebekah appears to have made for her sons, a home not walled by truth or the fear of God. But deceit was permitted in its sacred relations; lies found their way across its holy of holies, the mother's lips. Profane home, indeed, through which the worst things were allowed to rush, and low views of character prevailed. Let us remember, it needs not actual fraud or lies to make a home profane. Vulgar views of life, forgetfulness of God; purely material ambitions for the children, or unkind gossip, or querulousness and discontent,

or religious "gush" and cant—these make profane homes. A child's character has as little chance in them as Esau's had beneath Rebekah's tent.

Esau's was an open heart, naturally open and unreserved. You know the kind of man. He has fifty doors to the outer world where most of us have but two or three. And except angels be sent to guard them, the peril and ill-omen of such a man are very great. But instead of angels, Esau had by him only tempters—a tempter in his brother, a tempter in his mother. Unguarded by loving presences, unfilled by worthy affections, his mind became a place across which everything was allowed to rush; across which the commonest passions, like hunger, ran riot unawed by any commanding principles. That is what our text means by a *profane person:* an open and a bare character; unfenced and unhallowed; no guardian angels at the doors, no gracious company within, no fire upon the altar, but open to his dogs, his passions, his mother's provocations, and his brother's wiles.

Two points stand out from the consequent tragedy. The first is this.

In *Romola*, in the picture of the crisis of Tito's

life—Tito, you remember, the genial nature which was gradually led to crime by daily indulgence in little selfishnesses—George Eliot says: "He hardly knew how the words"—Tito had just denied his father, and the denial was useless as well as criminal—"he hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instance does the work of long premeditation." So it happened with Esau. *Esau came in from the field and was faint, and Esau said to Jacob, Let me swallow*, or *gulp down*—it is a greedy word—*some of this red, this red stuff, for I am faint. And Jacob said: Sell me first of all thy birthright. And Esau said: Lo, I am going to die, and what profit shall the birthright do to me!* But Jacob said: *First of all, swear to me!* One sees the hard look with which he spoke. *So he sware to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil-pottage, and he ate and drank, and went his way*—his large, careless way! *Thus Esau despised his birthright.*[1]

[1] Genesis xxv. 29-34.

Look at the two habits which came to a fatal crisis in that speech: the habit of yielding to appetite, and the habit of indulging in exaggerated feelings about oneself. *I am at the point to die!* We cannot believe it of the strong man. We hear in him his mother's unscrupulous voice. These two selfishnesses, physical and mental, fostered through a thousand half-conscious and now forgotten acts, sprang that moment to fatal empire, and at their bidding the deluded man sold his birthright. Sold the future and his honour, just because the sight of a mess of pottage had mounted to his unhallowed brain, and with the sight that sudden intoxication of mingled fear and vanity, which selfish and unregulated men so unconsciously but so surely bring upon themselves by constantly tippling exaggerated and false feelings.

Now, do not let us pride ourselves that we are safe from selling life and character for the sake of some tyrant passion. In the long run it is the little passions which betray us. There are more people cheated out of their spiritual birthrights by ordinary selfishness than by great lusts. Take, for instance, the habit which so easily grows upon us of considering our own comfort, or the other, almost

as easy, of insisting upon getting our own way in matters little as well as great. There are none which so disturb the proportions of life to our eyes. When a man has fallen into either of these habits, the smallest things, provided he has set his mind on them, assume gigantic proportions; and the day arrives when one of such trifles, swollen to importance only by his petty insistences upon it, serves to turn him, as the mess of pottage turned Esau, from some great right or opportunity of life. Such a man, rather than yield a point, will destroy his best friendship, will relinquish a pure affection, will keep a noble truth out of his mind; nay, may deny His Saviour—as Peter denied Him, for a physical passion so ignoble as that of fear, and for the sake of brazening out a lie in the face of a maid servant. Or take the other habit, which is evident in Esau, of thinking in an extravagant way about oneself, and magnifying one's symptoms. How prone we all are to that, and how easily it may cheat us of the great chances of life and render us unfit for life's noblest callings. There are men and women who exaggerate their ill-health, their fatigue, their overwork, or the wrongs they suffer from others, and so turn the very discipline by

which God would fit them for high duties into ways of escape from the same. Is it not lamentable that Christians who suffer the kind of wrongs Christ Himself made the way to glory, should feel these as reasons for being dispirited; and waste what strength is left them in vain recriminations, or in appeals for sympathy to—generally—the least worthy of their friends; to whom to appeal to is as much a snare and temptation as Esau found his crafty brother to be. How many become thus morally bed-ridden! The wrecked careers, the forfeited birthrights of this country are not all to be found in the drunkards' graves, or lurking in the shadows of the streets at night. They may be seen in comfortable homes, in church pews, in many a respectable, and apparently successful, position of affluence. They were needed to take the lead in Church or State. They were needed for inspiration in the crowd. But a base love of comfort, a wounded vanity, a selfish exaggeration of their importance or of their weakness, a cowardly yielding to the strain that should have brought them strength—turned them from their duty and their great right.

But I have said enough to remind you that

Esau's fatal crime may be repeated by any of us, who are not born hairy, who are not wild hunters, but plain, tame, church-going men and women.

The second point in the progress of Esau's ruin is this. His passion made him the prey of the first designing man he came across—who happened to be his own brother. Now, on this I should like to talk frankly to the young men before me. There is not a pleasure or a passion which tempts one of you, but there are men and women waiting along its path to make their gains out of it and you. Do not suffer yourselves to be deluded by either of the two attractions to a life of pleasure—by the ambition that you are going to play the full-grown man at once, or by the fancy that you will enjoy a cordiality and friendship you have not found in more sober circles. Whether it be drinking or gambling, or worse, to which such ambitions tempt you, remember that in that direction those are ready who will not make a man but a poor fool of you; who will not be your friends longer than you can prove of use to them. Almost every year of my ministry I have known men who have fallen thus—men, in some instances, who have lived to turn from their bedsides their most

frequent friends, and to add a bitter hatred of their fellow-sinners to the remorse with which they passed to the presence of their Judge.

Finally, let us get back to the word *profane;* for this is the centre of the whole evil.

Young men and women fence your characters. Make yourselves not common. Remember how John Milton has told us that he kept himself from the evils of his college days: " . . . a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness and self-esteem either of what I was, or what I might be (which let envy call pride), and lastly, that modesty, whereof . . . I may be excused to make some beseeming profession; all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together kept me still above those low descents of mind." I intreat you to be on your guard against the little vices. Take the question of truth. It seems to many an innocent thing to tell the lighter kinds of lies. That is a fatal mistake. The character which opens to such visitors will lie open to everything. Admit them, and you are certain some day to be betrayed into larger and more fatal issues. Nor ever tamper with the strenuous resistance you should offer to unhealthy thoughts. But remember that emptiness

is never sacredness. An empty mind is the unsafest and unholiest thing in the world. Remember how near the evil spirit and his seven companions were to the swept and garnished house. Jealously guard your hearts, indeed, from the evil world: still more jealously fill them from the world of holiness and truth. How necessary it is, my brothers, in the midst of this earthly life which "sipes" and soaks in upon these porous hearts of ours, to *lay hold on eternal life;* to pull it towards ourselves; to make our spiritual life not, as we often do, our indulgence and luxury, but our severest athletic and, at times even, our agony. Oh to live among noble things; to practise them, to take them to one's heart, to get the soul devoted to them; and to keep the body so pure that their appeals shall thrill it with the same fire with which it throbs too often to the sense of the unworthy and the base.

I have spoken of guardian angels, loving presences, which do help a man, next to his own conscience and agony, to keep his heart clean. Loving presences, holy parents, loyal friends to whom friendship is "the common aspiration," pure and honourable loves—these do keep a man from

giving himself away. But, my brothers, God has sent us One more powerful than even these. He has given us a Saviour: nothing less is implied in the Name of Jesus: a Saviour and how sufficient for the whole world! Above all, then, lay hold of Christ. He is near you—nearer your youth than ever, if you refuse Him now, He can appear to your later years. Let Him dwell in your hearts by faith, and that will keep their sanctuaries pure and their altars heaped with fire. Have you ever understood what He desires of you? It is not the taking of an arbitrary bond. It is not trust in a bare transaction. It is not assent to a creed. It is the giving of the heart and will to a living love and victorious example which have never failed any who have put their trust in Him.

It was something similar which made the difference between Esau and Jacob. When we meet them Jacob is as low and weak a character as we can conceive. But he laid hold on God, and would not let the blessing go; till at last we find him grown to the spiritual stature in which he passes from our sight.

So it may be with any here. Who feels most his weakness? Who most distrusts himself?

Who faces the future with the hopelessness born of the knowledge that temptations are waiting him there which he has never yet conquered, but they have put him to shame again and again? My brother, God's Love has come within your reach. In Christ lay hold of it. Set your will to His will, and you will find that to the first feeblest efforts you make, His Love draws near with a great trust in you, and His power is added with the assurance of victory.

XI

GIDEON. I

And the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour! And Gideon said unto him, Oh my lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His wondrous works, which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath cast us off and delivered us into the hand of Midian. And the LORD looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee? And he said unto Him, Oh Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.—JUDGES vi. 11-16.

A WRITER of our time has said of the story of Gideon that in force and beauty it is equal to any episode in the epic poems of Greece.

Whatever homage we may pay to it as literature, we cannot deny its moral reality. There are in it —it would be useless to ignore—certain features which neither the reason nor the conscience of many of us will readily accept. But there is present a character—a character with way upon him. Amid those far off wonders, we see a real man marching at the full height of his manhood: coming forth from God and effecting the work which was needed in his own day, in the spirit which is indispensable to God's service at all times. Gideon himself is real enough and strong enough to carry us past the difficulties of his story. May God quicken our sluggish lives to the pace, and lift them to the pitch, of his!

I

It was a period in which hope had died out of Gideon's people. They had been overrun by one of those tribes, whom God has bred in the deserts, for no other purpose, it would appear, than the scourging of delinquent civilisations. There have been barbarians from whom it was good for a land to suffer invasion; they have proved more profitable nurses of its powers than the civilised people

whom they dispossessed. But such has not been the case with most of the loose hordes whom Arabia has disgorged on the fertile lands to the west and north of her, and who have been without the instincts to settle and cultivate. Such Ishmaelites have not brought anything but ruin. They have spoiled the fields, stripped the woods, and by their recurring raids rendered civic life an impossibility.

For seven successive years Israel had suffered from such an invasion. It had crossed the Jordan, flowed up Esdraelon, and each year had risen higher upon the hill-country to the south. In the interior of Manasseh and Ephraim, the peasants were finding it ever more difficult to secure their harvests. The villages were being abandoned; and the population betaking themselves to caves and dens, where their families and their grain might be hidden from the raiding parties of the Arabs. This would have been a blow to any community; it was a terrible shock for Israel. They knew that they had been brought to the land by the hand of God Himself, revealed in many wonderful deeds on earth and sea. For a number of years they had been settled on the land, and had felt the instincts

of a progressive civilisation. Israel had risen above the tribes, by which they were surrounded; and they knew their distinction. They, too, like their neighbours, had been only a loose confederacy of small clans. But faith in the same God had bound those clans together, and had given them the consciousness of a nation. Their religion, especially under the leadership of Deborah, had brought forth patriotism, and the duties of discipline and self-sacrifice. By the character of their God, righteousness was enforced, grace and patience were exemplified, and it would even appear that (however dimly, for centuries were needed to bring them to face it) some instinct of a service beyond themselves already stirred within them. But now from such a position they were cast down by the stupidest and unthriftiest of peoples, who could teach them nothing, nor train them to any discipline, but were fit only to beat them back into the condition of cave-dwellers, hunted and craven, incapable of art, thought or hope. A nation driven to earth, men reduced to reptiles—can we conceive of a more desperate state of affairs?

Yet God had His servant in preparation, who was to work the deliverance.

II

It is remarkable that God chose a man, who not only had felt the strain of these terrible times, but whom the strain had wearied and torn with many doubts. For the very highest work God often chooses men who have doubted. Very few even are the great souls who, like Isaiah or Paul, are ready to answer God's call, upon the first answer to their doubts. Many of them, it is true, have only been doubters about themselves. Moses and Jeremiah held back from a sense of personal unfitness: *Thy servant is no speaker; I am a child.* Gideon, too, had a feeling of his unworthiness: *Oh my lord, wherewith shall I save Israel. Behold my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.* That, however, was only his second doubt: there was a previous and a darker temper of mind. Gideon was uncertain, not of himself only, but of his people, and of the whole purpose of God that had been declared to them. *Oh my lord, if the* Lord *be with us, why then has all this befallen us, and where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the* Lord *bring us up from Egypt? but*

now the LORD *hath cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian.* This is a very troubled spirit. We feel something here which cuts all the sinews of hope.

But the strong lesson, which shines so clearly from the story, is that there is no doubt too dark to be hopeless; none too deep for God to lift a man out of and make him a man of faith and energy. We need that lesson—we of to-day. The kind of doubt which is meeting many of our best young men upon their entry to manhood, is this kind. Gideon's words have a strong modern ring about them. It is just this cry, that the age of miracles is over; this despair, that we cannot continue to work with the brave beliefs and hopes of our fathers; this failure of faith in the presence and the leading of God Himself, which beset us. O, my brothers, if in any degree such feelings have attacked you, remember that they are not new, and they are not incurable. Men have been disciplined in this kind of doubt before; and have been brought out of it to a decisiveness and a power of action which have lifted nations behind them. Some doubt there must be for every man to suffer, who would do God's work in the world. For

doubt, if it be honest, means generally the mind to think and the heart to sympathise; and without thought and without sympathy I suppose not God Himself could make much of any man. But remember that mere academic doubts, doubts which rise from theorising, are no better than faiths which rise from the same source. Neither the intellectual restlessness of a mind with no practical problems to occupy it; nor the licentious freedom of a mind, which is loosened from conscience and the great natural pieties, is of any profit whatever. But doubt which rises from the pressure of life, from the awful mass of labour lying before society, from the apparent indifference and silence of the highest powers of the Universe to the wrong and the suffering that seem to persist and to grow; though it is the most desperate doubt into which a man may enter, is yet the kind that God has used, and will use, as the night from which His day shall spring, the baptism and the discipline of strong and confident careers of service.

III

Let us now see how Gideon's doubts are overcome. It is apparent that they are overcome, as

doubt is always overcome, by the constraint of a Personal Influence. We have in this Book the stories of some deep doubters; men who, when we meet them, are sitting encumbered by the intricate questions of their experience, and yet who before they pass from our sight have risen to lives of freedom and action. Now in every case the change has come, not because they have had their doubts answered, for the Bible contains singularly little argument in response to the questions which it starts; but because they have owned the obligation and felt the inspiration of Almighty God in His Personal Presence and Grace. When Moses and Jeremiah express to Him their doubts of their fitness for the work to which He has called them, God does not tell them that they are mistaken, or argue with them on the point. He simply lays His hand upon them; puts, that is, upon their hearts and consciences the constraint of His will; and lo! they are up and ready for the work. Or when Job utters to God the questions which have rendered his mind as raw and torn as ever his poor body is, God answers few or none of these, but reveals Himself to the Patriarch in His Power, and at His Presence every doubt is stilled. In the beautiful

poetry in which the story of Gideon is told to us, we see the same process related in a more naive and child-like form. He is met by One whom at first he addresses as if He were a fellow man. He tells his doubts about himself, about the people, about God. And the Other Person does not argue or seek to answer him. But instead there grows upon Gideon the sense that he is dealing with God, in the presence of whose command questions grow dumb, and beneath whose hand the sense of weakness and unfitness vanish away.

It is in no different fashion that men are released to-day from the hesitation and the fear which doubt produces. Remember that it is not by getting an answer to the hundred questions which trouble us that we are rendered fit to take a clear and decided course through life. Many of those questions will remain unanswered to the end. Many you will come to feel are not worth answering at all; and to some of even the most serious the issues of character and practical life will turn out to be indifferent. It is the Personal that fits us for a free and a great life. It is not an answer we need; it is a call. It is not to have mastered this or that answer to our questions; it is to

render obedience to a power which will bring us through the submission of our wills to light and to power.

Do not, therefore, let your youth be wholly spent in the enquiry: what can I get answered? This will appear in time. But be ready to put the great questions: What do I owe to God? What need has He for me in the world? What need have I of Him in my own weak and soiled nature? The answers to our doubts which in youth we are so confident of obtaining, are not always given to us. As I said, some are never reached, and some we do not care about as the years go on. But always very near to us is the Presence of our God in Jesus Christ; and as we grow in experience not less necessary does the constraint of His will feel to our hearts, but ever more real and indispensable. May God help you to feel that life is just this great moral question: What is the will of God for me? The more keenly you feel it, the nearer is His answer; and the fuller the grace He will give you to realise that answer for yourself and for others.

IV

Again, there is something for us to learn in the place where the vision of God appeared to Gideon.

In the central valleys of Manasseh, it appears to have been still possible for the Hebrew farmers to cultivate a little grain and to reap it. But it was impossible to thresh this on any of the proper threshing floors. These lie high, in order to catch the wind, and are visible from great distances. Gideon could not thresh his corn on one of them without attracting the notice of the Arab raiders. So he took his little harvest to the wine-press, and there, in the narrow space, not big enough to turn a threshing-sledge in, he beat out his grain painfully and slowly.

It is the picture of a man, manfully doing the one duty left to him, under extreme disadvantage, and while his heart is gnawed by doubt. Yet it was here, in this close atmosphere amid the dust, that the cramped man was found of God. Here, as he threshed his straw and his doubts together, God appeared to him; and the future which had been barred opened out to victory: opened

out through that narrow doorway in which the sunbeams and the dust were striving for mastery.

Here is a great lesson for us, that God appears to a man, who makes the most of what he has. The great cry: *The* Lord *is with thee, thou mighty man of valour*, falls on the ears not of one who has betaken himself on some adventure against his people's foes, but on this straitened and doubting farmer, doggedly doing the only work possible to him in the circumstances. *That*, say the words in which he is addressed, *that* is heroism.

There are few minds in which the religious issues are not entangled with personal interests. Discontent with one's own opportunities and advantages is ever prone to mix with and embitter the nobler questions of God's power and willingness to help the world. In our doubts about Him and His ways we have often, as the author of the Seventy-Third Psalm shows us, to search for and to cancel those selfish considerations which will intrude into what seems the most disinterested doubt. *My heart was in a ferment, and I was pricked in my reins. So brutish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee.* We must

obstinately eliminate all questions of personal ambition, of wrong done to ourselves, of discontent with the circumstances in which we are placed, before our doubt can be pure enough for God's Spirit to act upon. We must take what we have, work from where we find ourselves, do the duty that lies before us, if we would gain the light. Cynicism, wounded pride, peevishness, are not the tempers God comes to meet and to lift. The men He promotes are those who do their duty doggedly in such space and with such light as they have. He meets us, not on some wide ground of our own fancy, but where He has placed us, in the dust and din of our common life. This is the way His heroes are made. When you are apt to complain—as who is not sometimes?—that you have no opportunity for the hopes with which your heart is bursting; that your Lord is an *austere man;* that the facts of life frustrate faith; that the amount of mystery He leaves to us renders confident action and long hope impossible: remember to make the most of what you have, and to do the work that lies to your hand. Remember David Livingstone, who learned the rudiments of what gave him a University education and launched

him on his great career, in the noise of a spinning factory. Remember Gideon, whom God met and called a hero, because while suffering both from doubt and adversity, he still did what he could do with a brave and dogged heart.

XII

GIDEON. II

And it came to pass the same night that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down against the camp: for I have delivered it into thine hand. But, if thou fear to go down, go thou with Purah thy servant down to the camp; and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterwards shall thine hands be strengthened to go down against the camp. Then went he down with Purah his servant unto the outermost part of the armed men that were in the camp.—JUDGES vii. 9-11.

WHEN Gideon's doubts had been conquered (as we saw in a previous sermon), and his way was open to the great battlefield of his life, we are not to suppose that he immediately swept there. It was harvest time when God found him, and he may have required the months before the next Midianite invasion in order to summon the tribes of Israel to war. Then, when the Arab hordes again crossed the Jordan for the green grass and ripe corn of western Palestine, Gideon marched

upon their highway up the valley of Jezreel, with —the story tells us—many thousand men behind him.

1

These, however, were not an army, but a mob. The want of proper arms, such as other parts of the Book of Judges lament in the Israel of that period,[1] was not the real difficulty. This lay in the temper rather than in the equipment of the host. The people had been summoned in the name of their religion, and the enthusiasm which had brought them together now needed to be tested in face of the foe. Nor was a huge mass of fighters required for the sensible tactics, often employed in Oriental warfare, which Gideon had been moved to select: the rush of a small band of resolute men upon the self-confident enemy while they were asleep, so as to throw them into panic. Therefore, first, it was necessary to get rid of all those whose religious enthusiasm could not stand the stern realities of the field; whose vision of things unseen melted before the visible enemy upon the plain below them. *Whosoever is fearful and trembling,*

[1] Judges iii. 31; v. 8; cf. 1 Sam. xiii. 19-22.

let him return and depart. And the great majority returned. *Others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth; and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was risen they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away.*[1]

A second winnowing of the levies which remained is more obscure in its purpose. But, unless it was purely arbitrary, which is not probable, this appears to be its proper explanation. Between the edge of the hills, where the Hebrew army had arrived, and the Midianite host, spread on the plain below, there lay a spring, a pool, and some watercourses thick with reeds. Gideon was led to take his thirsty men down to the pool on the level of the plain, and test in what manner they would take their needed refreshment in face of the enemy. Some *lapped* the water, that is took it as quickly and with as little interruption of their general bearing as dogs make in drinking; but the rest bowed down on their knees to drink. Unless the test was purely arbitrary, which it is difficult to believe on any critical theory of the text, the

[1] Matthew xiii. 5, 6.

difference between the two classes was this: that some, mindful of the enemy so near and of their possible outposts ambushed in the reeds, drank hastily in a position nearest the erect, and one which did not break their vigilance; while the rest knelt down, forgetful of the foe, and drank in an attitude more comfortable, but more easy to be surprised. This certainly would be a kind of test to appeal to the Oriental mind.[1]

If such be the right explanation, we have in it the symbol of a great distinction among those who, in whatever age, have obeyed the summons of God to work or to warfare for His high ends. What attitude do they take to the foe? What thoughts of the foe determine that attitude? In face of the evils they are called to fight, what use do they make of the necessary refreshments that lie before them? Do they use food, rest, wealth, joy, as men who take these only the better to fit them for their work, and without relaxing their discipline and vigilance? Or, in their greed for comfort, do they forget the ends for which they have been called, and put themselves into attitudes in which they may be surprised and beaten? These are a

[1] The story requires a good deal of textual criticism.

series of questions, which, whether the explanation of the story just given be correct or not, it is necessary for each of us in Christ's Kingdom to put to himself, honestly and frequently. *He shall drink of the brook in the way: and so lift up his head.*[1] Yes; but the Work, the War, is that to which God has called us; and we have to see that the blessings, which He has strewn for us in the way, are used by us with due respect to that Work, and not as indulgences, which relax our vigilance or sap our strength in face of it.

In parallel to Gideon's selection of his force, we may look for a little at the story of the enlistment of Cromwell's Ironsides upon the eve of the Civil War. Cromwell did as Gideon did. His large levies he winnowed and sifted again and again, turning away numbers of volunteers, and choosing those whom he kept not because of their strength or experience in fighting, still less for their rank or social position, but "because they had the fear of God." He calls them "our handful"; and in answer to those who blamed him for his unusual rigour in recruiting, he replied: "I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain, that knows what he

[1] Psalm cx. 7.

fights for, and loves what he knows, than what you call a 'Gentleman,' and is nothing else." "Who knows what he fights for and loves what he knows" —what a fine definition it is of the true soldier! In that great war the issues were not what every man might understand, or lightly put his heart to. There was no national flag, no hereditary enemy, no obvious patriotism. The issues were spiritual and complex; needing discernment and a keen conscience. It is not different with ourselves. There is so much to cross the moral issues before us, and to distract our minds; so much that is attractive and strong to beget enthusiasm, though utterly beside the great Question; and so much more that is in its degree innocent, relevant and even necessary, yet so liable to absorb our fickle hearts, that for its sake we may forget the main ends for which we are here. God make us who are of His Church men who "know what they fight for and love what they know," past the love of food and drink, of comfort and of wealth!

II

But now Gideon's prolonged preparation is over, and his three hundred are chosen. We might

expect that such careful measures having been taken to eliminate human pride from this great enterprise, there would immediately ensue some miracle of victory. Instead, we are called to follow a slow and intricate story of ordinary Eastern warfare, in which the one thing supernatural is the faith in God's guidance that fills His soldiers, and the issue works out through military adventure and strategy on the one side, and through natural alarm and panic on the other.

This new departure is very quietly related by the narrative. The same night on which the three hundred had been chosen, the Lord said to Gideon: *Arise, get thee down against the camp* of the Midianites, *for I have delivered it into thine hand.* It was the supreme moment: a rush, with the hand of God upon him, and victory had been Gideon's in half an hour. But, whether Gideon faltered at the call, or God knew that the man needed some further inspiration than faith, He added: *But if thou fear to go down,* that is with the whole band upon the full adventure, *go,* first, *thyself with Purah thy servant,* and reconnoitre; *and thou shalt hear what they say, and then thy*

hands shall be strengthened to go down with the three hundred *against the camp.*

So, instead of the whole regiment rushing upon Midian in the strength of their faith, we see two men carefully picking their way from bush to bush in the darkness to where the camp fires of Midian glimmer across the plain. Instead of the sweep of the inspired band, every throat of the three hundred loud with triumph, we have the leader, the principal life in the enterprise, checking every second breath he draws, as he feels how his safety hangs upon the breaking of a twig, or the wakefulness of an Arab sentry. Contrast Gideon under that first inspiration of the evening, when God offered him victory for the rush at it, and Gideon now crawling from cover to cover, conscious that his life and the cause committed to him hang upon the breaking of a twig, the flicker of a flame: whether, it may be, that half-asleep Ishmaelite on the outermost part of the camp will have energy enough to kick the bit of bush his feet are toying with into the fire and scatter its light five feet further into the darkness—for if he does, Gideon will be seen.

Now, that is a strange plunge from the ideal to

the actual, and yet, I suppose, there never yet was a great leader, there was hardly ever a common soldier of God, who did not have to pass through the same train of experiences: when at one hour he felt the hand of God upon him in the conviction of immediate victory, and the next was groping his uncertain way towards a preliminary understanding of the situation on which God had called him to act. Take Cromwell again for illustration. There is evidence that in the early days of his military career he was not without occasions of feeling that God would give him the victory soon; but then he was plunged into all his commissariat troubles: seeking some twenty more muskets for his men, or half a dozen uniforms; writing letters to drag the arrears of their pay out of the authorities; or settling quarrels among his fellow-officers.

It is so with every one of us, whether the work before us be that of some great cause to which God has called us, or the building of our own character. Gideon's preliminary miracle comes surely to all: the inspiration of God's word in our hearts, the conviction that the great hope is within reach, or that moral victory and peace are immediately

possible. But this never excludes the need of a knowledge of the situation; the use of means; the going down upon painful and, it may be, perilous tasks, when in the darkness all the sense of your frailty comes upon you, and in spite of God's voice, so strong a few hours back, you feel your mission or your character hanging on things as trifling as the breaking twigs and flickering flames at which Gideon checked his breath that night on Esdraelon.

Is it a work you have got to do for God in the world? Then, He has not called you to it without the promise of victory; and there come baptisms of conviction from His hand, under the power of which you feel as if it were to be won for the rush at it. But do not count on that as everything. It is real, and given to you for strength, but do not expect it to start wings on your shoulders or that the rest of your career is to be a flight. Do not be disappointed, if in a few hours duty sends you painfully to grope your way through the dangerous and unknown. Victory is certain; but you have got the situation to learn; you have got the enemy to understand; you have got the slow, dead work of a scout to do, before you can lead the forces you feel behind you to their promised triumph.

But it may be character which God is inspiring you to win. Which of us does He not so inspire? Is there any man here who has not felt that most wonderful miracle which God's Spirit works upon earth—the conviction that for him, a poor sinner, foiled and shamed on many fields of moral battle, a clean heart and the brave doing of God's will are still possible. Surely every one of us has known what it is to believe that. Now, by the God of Gideon, do not let us be disheartened if such moments of assurance are followed by long, dull days in which we feel far otherwise. Days of slow progress across a ground covered with slumbering temptations, which any moment may spring to assault us, and we feel our whole character at peril. It is then our duty simply to be watchful, and to fulfil our scouting by vigilance and prayer. God has sent us among the enemy that we may know his strength; and if instead of losing our conscience, as so many do, in a moral panic at the easily wakened temptations by which they are surrounded, we exercise self-restraint, and, above all, employ that prayer, which casts all surrounding temptations into deeper sleep, we shall win through,

and have back again our hours of moral security and power. In Bunyan's allegory, the Pilgrim did not arrive at the House Beautiful except by passing between lions placed there for the trial of faith where it is, and for the discovery of those that have none. He must have had between them as anxious a time as Gideon among the Midianites. But he obeyed his orders to keep in the midst of the path, and went on with prayer, till that night his lodging was in the chamber called Peace, where he sang as he awoke in the morning that he felt already next door to Heaven.

Young men, do not, I repeat, be disheartened by temptation. If you have in your heart the real miracle: the knowledge that God has made you for Himself, that you are His sons, and that by Christ He has promised to give you the victory, hold on in the strength of that; and your hours of walking painfully through a land of temptations, where you feel your weakness and loneliness, will open to days of power and of the assurance of victory.

XIII

THE SONG OF THE WELL

And thence to Be'er: this is the Be'er [*or* Well] of which the LORD said unto Moses, Gather the people together and I will give them water. Then sang Israel this song:

Spring up, O well! Sing ye back to her!
Well which princes digged,
Which nobles of the people delved,
With the sceptre and with their staves,
[From the desert a gift].[1]—NUMBERS xxi. 16-18.

IN Eastern life, there is no drudgery worse than that of drawing water. *Hewers of wood and drawers of water* is the Bible's name for slaves of the lowest class. You read the proof on the lips of the Well itself, where the soft ropes dragged

[1] Professor Budde has proposed to take this line from the connecting prose of the itinerary to which it is assigned in our version, *From* (*the*) *wilderness to Mattanah* (a name which means *gift*), and to add it to the song.

daily through the centuries have cut deep into the stone; and again on the lined faces of the daughters of the people, as they gather to their task. Eliezer of Damascus found a bride at the Well, but that was in the morning of the world. She whom Christ encountered was a drudge, whose first prayer to Him was: *Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw.* The tramp to the Well, the frequent quarrel for one's turn, the strain to lift the bucket from the deep pool, the climb home again with the high, full jar on the head—it is all a constant weariness and almost unrelieved. For in the East, women while at work seldom or never sing.

Where men address themselves to the task, as shepherds have to do, they often sing; and their singing is sometimes of the kind which glorifies their labour with memory and with hope. Such an effort we find in the Song before us. It is one of the most ancient pieces of Scripture, but long before it became Scripture, it had descended, perhaps through many generations, on the lips of labour, in the open air and sunshine, where the gravel rattles under the feet of the shepherds, *in*

the places of drawing water. Wherever the Well may have been at whose starting this Song was first sung, the verses were probably handed down through the daily routine of many wells. In Palestine, there are watering-places which are at once fountains and cisterns. A deep shaft has been sunk near some dry torrent bed to release the underground waters; and though the water lives and leaps below, a long pull is required to bring it to the surface. The drawers who sang this song knew that their well was alive. They called to each other to *sing back to it:* the verb means to sing in antiphon, to answer the music of the waters with their own. That spirt in the dark hollow was not the only well-spring; the men's hearts gushed back to it: fountain called to fountain,

Spring up, O well! Sing ye back to it.

And the human music is worthy of the other. It recalls that condition of life which is ideal, to which nations look back as their golden age, to which a living Church looks forward as part of the coming Kingdom of the Father: men of all ranks as brothers, and sharing the work which is indispensable to the common weal. For I do not feel

that the opinion is correct which explains the lines,

> *Well, which princes digged,*
> *Nobles of the people delved it*
> *With the sceptre and with their staves,*

as if these celebrated some separate function of the leaders of the people, either by the use of the divining-rod to discover the water, or by a solemn ritual, before the common labourers opened the ground. The words *dig* and *delve* are too thorough for such a meaning and compel us to interpret the verses as describing the share which the princes and nobles took in turning up the soil. They *delved*, they *dug*. And thus, generation after generation of water-drawers was reminded that their well had been started by great men; that the work, which now meant drudgery, was in its origin invention, zeal, high-born character, self-sacrifice, loyal brotherhood. To recall this would take away from the workers the sense of servitude. Duties which had such memories could never become cheap. The baptism which had blessed the work in the beginning was upon it still.

I

In such a Song, I find much inspiration. We are all, whatever our callings may be, ministers of the common life, with the constant need to ennoble and glorify its routine. All of us who are worthy to work, have to do with wearisome details; and as it were, like those Eastern water-drawers, hand over hand every day upon the same old ropes. And the tendency of many, even of those whose is the ministry of the Word and the Church, is to feel their life dreary and their work cheap. We leave romance to the soldier, wonder to the man of science, and to the statesman the nobility of standing in a great succession. We come to regard our work as merely privative and exhausting; and are tempted to seek our inspiration in getting away from it, through literature and art, into lives which we imagine more blessed than our own with the heritage of great memories. What fools we are! Literature and art have no more real use for us than to throw us back with new light upon ourselves and our work: showing us how high we stand, and how glorious it may be. This is what their song did for the drawers of water. And in

every piece of hard work you engage in, so it be honest and helpful to the progress of society, the same inspiring memories are at your disposal which were theirs who sang of the princes that dug their well, and the nobles who delved it with their sceptres and their staves. There is not a bit of routine, however cheap our unthinking minds may count it, but it was started by genius. The fundamental facilities of life, the things we use as carelessly as we tread the pavement: the fire we light, the alphabet we use, our daily bread, the coins we handle, the wheels that carry us along, the glass through which we see heaven—each of them represents some early venture of man's spirit even greater in its influence on the race than those inventions and discoveries which we count the crowning glories of our crowning century. The very language we use—Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, Milton's were the mouths that forged it. We can hardly utter a great word, or a variation of its meaning, without moulding our lips to the accent and emphasis of some original spirit. There is not a crank the miller turns, not an engine or brake upon our railways, not a boat that sails our seas, but required character and, in many cases, genius,

for its invention and employment in the service of humanity. In manual toil, in commerce, in education, in healing, and in public service, not a bit of routine rolls on its way but the saints and the heroes were at the start of it. *Princes dug this Well, yea the nobles of the people delved it with the sceptre and with their staves.*

If I rehearse these commonplaces, it is only that we may feel how our life, in the fibre and grain of it, is saturated with this purple wonder: the love and the blood of the hearts of the greatest. In our day there are those who say that knowledge, like the pitiless Eastern Sun, the more it rises the more it bleaches life; taking the dear twilight out of the air and colour and wonder from the things about us. That is not true. Knowledge can never take the wonder out of God's world, nor faith in God Himself. It is he who refuses to be taught who loses the charm and solemnity of life. Cease to learn, and in time you will starve the faculties of admiration, of reverence, and of gratitude, which in their union are worship and the very strength of a spiritual faith. But among all her services to us, knowledge can perform none more religious than this: to take us back to the

inspired origin of all common things we handle or administer. She teaches us that nothing is cheap. She reminds us whom we have succeeded; from what great and wounded hands our various charges in life have been left to us; by what a cloud of witnesses we are surrounded.

Before we conclude we shall see how this lesson runs through the routine of our congregational life: let us now remember it along two other lines of work, where its inspiration is equally needed. There is, for instance, teaching. Where may memory bring a stronger inspiration than just here? Where are more recollections of the loftiest minds putting themselves to the common service; and not only by their devotion ennobling what must often seem petty details and monotonous methods; but by their fellowship lightening our responsibilities, and by their invention and their courage heartening us to changes and improvements of our own. Another application is for all of us. We live under a political dispensation, in which the offices of government are shared by the crowd; and the commonweal is achieved not by the genius or force of the few, but by the patient routine of innumerable citizens;

working through local councils, boards, committees and other institutions. Now where such labour seems stale and weary, let us carry into it the memory of its historical origins. Let us remember not only who dug for us these wells we daily serve, but by what sacrifice of costly lives the ground was cleared and defended against the oppressor; and by what steadfastness of character the water has been kept pure. If high and low among us had vision of all this, the political life of our land would glow with a splendour like the purple glories of her summer hills.

II

But the Light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world, Himself took flesh and dwelt among us. Among the million memories of men we have one that is unique. We can trace the sacredness and glory of our life to-day, not only to this or that great man whom God raised up to think and to work, but to the Incarnation of God Himself. In the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself did dig these wells of ours. The liberties, offices and inspirations, of which I have spoken, were opened and fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

The life which other men illustrated and ennobled in fragments, was suffered and achieved by Him in perfect purity. He fulfilled all our relations, felt all our temptations, bore all our burdens and sorrows. The Incarnation was not the abstraction with which many a theology has been content. The Incarnation of the Gospels was a birth into a home, a looking up into a mother's face, childhood with brothers and sisters about it; youth taking friends to itself; manhood breaking with these friends into the larger life of the nation. It was—in home and workshop—obedience, discipline and labour. It was—abroad—journeying, ministering by the roadside, teaching, debate. See how His parables reveal Him in touch with every common office of society! Servants and masters, judges and clients, kings and their lieutenants; the fisherman, the shepherd, the husbandman, the delver finding treasure; the beggar at the gate, the unemployed in the market place, the steward and the merchantman—see how He lived the lives of all these men, glorifying their routine, and using their relations and tempers and methods as illustrations of God's relations with us, and of how we ought to seek and may find Him.

The Parables are the measure of the breadth of our Lord's Incarnation; but His Temptation, His Pain and Weariness, His Shame of the world's sin, His Agony and Forsakenness, His Cross and Death, are its depths.

When we remember breadth and depth alike, we understand how sacramental every hour of life may be. Of that special ordinance of our Lord's institution, wherein is shown forth to believers the saving grace of His Death for sin, He said, *This do in remembrance of me.* If a man's faith begin there he shall indeed have penitence enough, and freedom and love enough to fulfil the life of which that Death was the redemption from impotence and despair. But let not his remembrance stop there; for by the fulness of the Incarnation there is no part of common life which may not also be a memorial of the Lord. *I will make*, He said by the prophets, *the place of my feet glorious.* There is no place which to-day is the place of our feet, in the paths of duty or of suffering, but it has been the place of His feet as well; and the air about it is full of His patience and His victory. Live dutifully, obediently, resolutely, and all you have to do you shall do in His remembrance. You

may make life one whole sacrament. And if your faith and understanding be really awake, this hourly sacrament of life shall be as the sacrament of His Death, not a memorial only but communion with Himself. You shall be like her who found Him seated on the Well, which was her routine and daily drudgery. He will not take the drudgery away, even as He gave no answer to her first prayer: *Sir, give me of this water, that I thirst not neither come hither to draw.* But He gave her that which she carried with her in her heart, every time she came back with her jar; finding Himself not by the Well only, but on the road, and in her home, till her daily work grew a communion with Him. So may it be with us if we be found of Him as she was. *Sir, thou hast nothing to draw and the well is deep; whence then hast thou that living water?* She received her answer when He fathomed the deeper well of her own heart, when He cleansed it, and by His word called to spring up in it the water of life.

In this command of the spiritual life of man, Jesus stands alone. His power over it reaches the pitch of creative force. It is well for us to summon up the multitude of our forerunners, our big

brothers of the crowd, not only that we may praise Him who is the Light that lighteneth all; but that we may confess the end of their help where His begins. Helpful they are as fellow-worshippers and fellow-workers, with their example and their infection of energy and patience. *But He hath entered within the veil.* Helpful they are in the outer sunshine or storm of life; helpful in their testimony that God was with them, our brothers, in the work in which we have succeeded them. *But He hath entered within the veil.* In the loneliness of sin, on the battle ground of temptation we know how far away the crowd feels; how irrelevant our brothers' merit, how helpless our brothers' love. It is just there that Christ penetrates and proves Himself Divine. Of our guilt He tells us, I have borne it, and thou art forgiven; of our sin, This is my charge; of our weakness, *My grace is sufficient for thee;* of our shame and our hopelessness, I trust thee with my work; be of good cheer; go and do it.

Other forces have helped men to penitence, but it is a historical fact that nowhere have men found penitence so real as at the foot of the Cross of Christ. Other voices have proclaimed the need of

a new birth: He alone has been able to make the dead soul live. Therefore, while we thank God that our common life is everywhere glorified by the memories of the great, and that the air is full of hope, because there is no spot we can tread or work we are called to perform, but was the field or the trophy of some heroism of a brother spirit, let us remember above all that we have Christ Himself, through whom God hath appointed us to obtain salvation.

III

These religious uses of memory, we are now ready to apply to that routine, to which we are bound as members and ministers of Christ's Church. I do not mean the life of the Church as a whole, but the work and conduct of the single congregation. In our day the Christian congregation suffers from much depreciation, due to a conspiracy of causes, both within and without the Church, which it is not now necessary to detail. In face of them the recollection may be useful of what opportunities and what inspirations some of the greatest men and women have found in the instrument which we administer. Of no other

routine in social life may we more justly say that *princes digged this well*, that *the nobles of the people delved it with the sceptre and with their staves.*

The influence of the Christian congregation upon history, the contribution of the parish to the world, is a subject which is waiting for a historian. He will lay bare a thousand almost forgotten wells, which from all the centuries still feed some of the strongest currents of human life. Many types of character; much that is imperishable in literature and art; much that has become world-wide in education and the organisation of charity, have found their origins in congregational life.

To prove this we may begin with the Bible. The Psalter, now the confessional of half humanity, was at first the hymn book of a little mountain sanctuary and congregation in one of the most obscure provinces of the world. The Epistles, cherished as the Word of God, were originally addressed to small conventicles of men and women; and are engaged with the circumstances, the duties, the scandals and the sins of congregational life. When we pass from the Canon to the early history of the Church we find illustrations of

the same truth. The most dignified offices in the Church Catholic were originally, as their titles imply, offices within the congregation. Individual churches were the first to organise relief for the sick poor, and the means of redemption for the slave. Monasteries proved the fertile mothers of art and literature; and kings were sometimes the indispensable patrons of the same. But we cannot forget that many of the finest ecclesiastical buildings were originally parish churches, and represent the piety and the skill of local congregations. Character was often wonderfully developed in the cloister, and magnificently exercised upon the high places of the Church; but it was at the parish font that her saints were baptized into Christ; in the parish school and from the parish pulpit that they were taught the mind of Christ; and by the example and the prayers of ordinary congregations, that their characters were first tempered.

The same is equally conspicuous after the Reformation. From that event to our own day many of the enduring monuments of Christianity have been produced in the ordinary course of a parish ministry and in order to meet some exigency of congregational experience. Not to weary you,

let me take one or two instances from either end of the history of the Reformed Church. We all know Luther's hymns, which are as national anthems in their fatherland, and even in translation so inspiring to ourselves. They sprang out of the needs of a little congregation. Being settled as pastor at Wittenberg, and realising that his flock could not express their evangelical experience in the old Church chants, Luther, who had never before made verses, stood up and struck out of himself those few imperishable hymns. Take another singer, whose hymns will be sung as long as there is a Church upon earth. Isaac Watts was a young man in a little congregational church in the south of England, in which many of the hymns were tedious doggerel. When he complained he was challenged to produce something better; and this was the origin of the long series of hymns which include "O God, our help in ages past," "Before Jehovah's awful throne" and "When I survey the wondrous Cross." Nearer our own day are two other instances which I may quote. Chalmers' system of poor-relief, of which the last has not been heard, arose from his labours and observations among the poor of his own parish in Glasgow.

And those classics of our language, Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, were written in the ordinary course of his ministry, and many of the finest, we are told, were preached to his afternoon congregations, composed of the humbler classes of society.

To these instances, almost taken at random, I might add the testimonies of strong men, and the most of them not Churchmen; as for example Wordsworth, Carlyle, Browning and Ruskin, who have left on record their witness to the value of the fellowship or the ministry of humble congregations. In writing (in 1866) of the little church in Dumfriesshire to which his parents took him when a child Carlyle says: "Very venerable are those old Seceder clergy to me now, when I look back. . . . Most figures of them in my time were hoary, old men; men so like evangelists in modern vesture and poor scholars and gentlemen of Christ, I have nowhere met with among Protestant or Papal clergy in any country in the world. . . . That poor temple of my childhood is more sacred to me than the biggest cathedral then extant could have been; rude, rustic, bare, no temple in the world was more so; but there were sacred lambencies,

tongues of authentic flame, which kindled what was best in one, what has not yet gone out."[1] Browning in his *Christmas Eve* comes back to the little squalid conventicle from which he burst in disgust, and gives us these lines about it.

"I then in ignorance and weakness
Taking God's help have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship as most to his mind
Where earthly aids being cast behind
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between.
. . . . . .
It were to be wished that the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure,
Heaven soon sets right all other matters."

I have quoted enough. There has been in the past under God no instrument which He has blessed more than the ordinary routine of congregational ministry. Genius has found her occasions in its needs; the greatest characters have traced their qualities to its discipline; the most permanent and glorious fruits of our religion have sprung from its opportunities. If, then, any of us in the

[1] Froude's *Thomas Carlyle*, Vol. I. 11, 12.

course of his ministry grows lax and weary as though he served an institution mean and uninspiring, let him stand up in his place and gird himself with memories like these. New vigour and joyfulness will be given him, new powers of aspiration and prayer. His heart will sing back to his work, and he will answer its dear details with a burst of praise.

Spring up, O well! Sing ye back to it!
Well which the princes dug,
The nobles of the people delved it
With the sceptre and with their staves.

But while he is conscious of so great a cloud of witnesses, let him remember above all, that the Church he serves is that which Christ bought with His blood; and founded upon a rock; and that He has said of it: *Where two or three are gathered together there am I in the midst of them.*

XIV

SERMON BEFORE COMMUNION. I

He restoreth my soul.—Psalm xxiii. 3.
I am the Bread of Life.—John vi. 35.

RELIGION is a fountain of life or nothing at all. When it is practised as a round of solemn functions, or trusted only as the assurance of a future salvation, or obeyed as a series of precepts and doctrines; then the soul is deceived and starved; and we need the voice of Jesus to cry loudly in our ears—*I came that they may have life, and that they may have it abundantly.*[1]

Every heart will tell itself that this is the gospel which it requires. To every man left to himself life means loss: a steady drain of strength and purpose, of courage and hope, of belief in the worth of his work and in the worth of his fellow-men. Without God we are always

[1] John x. 10.

losing. Even conscience survives only as an afterglow, and the best of habits tend to grow mechanical and barren. But worse still, however hard, beyond our fault, the strain of life may be, and however cruel its temptations, we cannot in the loss they bring to us wholly escape the sense of responsibility for it. I do not speak of gross sins, but of ordinary selfishness, of treachery to ideals to which we gave ourselves, of neglect of light and love lavished upon us, and of the guilt of a frequent cowardice in things both little and large. In every honest man these breed a shame and a sickness of himself; from which our feeble human nature, finding it intolerable, seeks defence by building round itself a great shell of callousness and indifference—a remedy infinitely worse than the pains it alleviates, for while they were at least the symptoms of life, this is death.

What remedy have we against all that waste of the soul except by receiving God and His daily gift of life in Jesus Christ? Our only hope is that He shall draw us forth from the secrets of our own heart with the shame and mistrust of these removed; that He shall interpret to us a meaning and purpose in our lives; impart to us the powers

of His own nature; infect us with His love for men; and so send us on our way with a hope and courage that even death cannot quench. We need these things from God: and He can give them to us, He alone. But by your presence here, by your waiting on an ordinance, which means nothing if not new life from Him, you testify to a very deep sense of your need and of His power to fill it. Therefore, I turn to some description of God's restoration of our souls, without further preface than to say just this.

In our day there is a great deal of talk abroad to the effect that character, or the moral qualities which compose it, cannot be communicated from the outside to the soul of man. A distinction is made between knowledge and character. It is said that knowledge may be put into a man, but that character can only be won by the man's own fighting for it, or cultivated by the man's own sedulous gardening of his heart. It is vain, say some, to talk of "supermoral" grace, or of sudden changes in the state of, or additions to the amount of, a man's character. Such a thing is the conception of a magic which is impossible in the moral life, and which can only be injurious to the latter

by absorbing a man's attention from those duties of his own will and those convictions of his own responsibility, by which alone character is bred and made secure.

Now it is a question how far such common assertions of outsiders to our religion are due to indolent believers themselves, and to their false sense of divine grace, as if this were a thing magically or mechanically intruded into a man's mind without the operation of naturally moral forces either on the part of Him who gives or on the part of us who receive it. But whoever be to blame for the fallacy, look what a fallacy it is! To make such a distinction between knowledge and character and to say that knowledge can be put into a man from the outside but character cannot, is false. There is not a bit of information, however slight, which can enter the mind of a man, without carrying with it, for good or evil, some influence on his character. And when the knowledge thus introduced is of high moral facts: of a divine righteousness and love, of a great self-sacrifice and patience, of a full victory over sin; such a knowledge must feed the soul—except it be hardened or hopelessly corrupt—with a strength of character

past all calculation. Yet such is the Christian religion. It is knowledge to begin with. It is a proclamation of truth: what God is in His Nature and Character. It is the publication of good tidings: what He wills, and what He has done, for us men. And our faith is not the intellectual conception of these things, as if we could shut off heart and conscience from them, but it is the opening of our whole nature to their moral influences. God is Himself the maker of that nature, and when His grace comes to us it is not by some unnatural or magical way, that avoids or overbears the faculties with which He has Himself endowed us; but it uses these to persuade, inspire and save us from death. *He restoreth my soul:* the soul He has Himself created. Do not let us be misled because some have labelled this process with the names "arbitrary," "magical," and "supermoral." Where, in the process, is there anything hostile to morality? or anything that is not natural? It is not a process in which upon one side there is a bare Authority or Force, and on the other a slave's mind or dead matter. But it is a process in which the purest moral forces are awake

on both sides, and I will add, no forces that are not moral. God comes to us men, how? In nothing but the bare strength of His Holiness and Love, in the power of a great self-sacrifice, in the testimony of the moral redemption of countless lives like our own. And we meet Him, how? With an honest facing of the truth about ourselves, with a quick conscience, with the sense of our guilt and need, with penitence and the hunger after righteousness. Should any one approach this means of grace with the imagination of a magic influence overbearing, or having nothing to do with, his moral faculties, he may enjoy an hour's awe or an hour's enthusiasm. But he will not have met God, nor have received the gift of life.

Now what are some of the chief details of this natural and wholly moral restoration of our souls by God? Christ has set it forth very plainly in the Gospels—we may look this morning at three of His methods. *First*, by beginning at the beginning. *Second*, by awakening in us the conscience of the infinite difference between obedience and disobedience. *Third*, by revealing self-sacrifice as the only secret of the fulness of life.

I

First then: Deep down in the heart of every man, wearied and weakened by sin, lies the instinct that for him restoration can only come through beginning life again at the very beginning; and Christ is worshipped to-day by men as their Saviour, because He has a gospel and a power to satisfy this instinct. He said to men, come back and begin again at the beginning, and, trusting Him, they found they could. He did not do this in the merely negative way in which His Gospel has sometimes been misrepresented. He did not only say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; live out the rest of thy life, sparingly with the dregs thy prodigal past has spared thee. Nor only, Thou art free, go thy way. He did not leave men where their life had run to sand. He led them back to where life was a fountain. Sometimes He did this in the simplest way. When the woman who had sinned was left alone with Him, He did not only say, *Neither do I condemn thee*, and so get rid of her. He added, *Go and sin no more*. What an impossible order for poor mortals to receive! Yet to hear Christ say it is not only to hear the

command but to feel its possibility. And why? Not because the soul is overborne by a magical influence, which works without respect to her own powers. But because Christ makes her feel that in forgiving her God infects her with His own yearning for her purity, constrains her faculties by His love, enlists her will among the highest forces of the Universe, and the purest personalities of her own kind, and above all trusts her—there is no more natural or moral power in all the Universe than that of trust—trusts her to do her best in the discipline and warfare that await her; trusts her to be loyal to Him, and trusts her capacity to overcome. My brethren, the men who believe that Christ brings to them these divine affections, return to life feeling that it is not folly to try again, feeling that they dare struggle with temptation once more; feeling that victory is not impossible. The memories of failure perish. Experience is discounted. The stinging, sneering, unnerving voices of the past are silenced: and life is re-started from the beginning.

It is only another way to state all this when we say that Christ reveals God to us as our Father, and makes us sure that we are His children. What

a new attitude for life! How it is rolled away back and we are at its fountains again, with all its possibilities before us!

II

If we carefully read the Gospels, we shall find that next to revealing the Father, our Lord insisted most upon the infinite difference between obedience and disobedience. On this His words are always stern and frequently awful.

Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time: Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement. But I say unto you, whoso is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgement. Then follow His still more penetrating words about adultery and lust. And the Sermon closes with the parable of the builders. *Whoso heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house,*

and it fell not, for it was founded on the rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

Can we, however sleepy or dull of conscience we may be, however self-indulgent or flattered by the world—can we listen to words like these without a startling restoration of the soul? From such a voice, so stern, so final, we cannot go back to do again what we so lightly did before: to the tricks of our trade, our compromises with truth and duty, our half-hearted fulfilment of our relations with our fellow-men. The infinite alternatives of our life are laid open before us. Our conscience is again awake.

Yet it is not only the Lord's words, but Himself who restoreth our soul. How He lived, even more than what He said, is our conscience. You know the plausible habit we all slide into of giving ourselves this or that indulgence because it is within our right, or because the tempter said it was natural Then there rises before us the

figure of the Son of God tempted even thus in the wilderness. And immediately we have power to see that a thing is not right to do merely because we can do it, or because it lies along the line of our natural appetites. And our soul is restored as nothing else could have restored it.

Or we are beginning to take life easy, and form low views of the possibilities of character. God's will does not appear to us a very difficult thing to do. We hold it enough to be pretty regular in our prayers, and are satisfied with aiming at respectability in life. Perhaps the generous fires of youth have died down and we are content with the amiability, the fidelity to order and routine, the mechanical interest of a few invested virtues, of which some men become so proud with age. In the long low levels of middle life, we forget the shortness of time and the approach of judgment. With the years we fatally learn how easy it is to hide our faults from the eyes of our fellow men: and to soothe our consciences by their kindly tolerance or careless indifference to our inner character. We are satisfied with the fulfilment of a few personal relations near to us, and forget the sorrow and the sin of the world further off. Then we

look to Him who was tempted to the very end, and who felt in every temptation an awful peril to character; to whom the doing of His Father's will was a struggle and an agony; who *in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, and was heard in that He feared—in that He* FEARED; and who carried to the Cross the burden of the world's sin and wretchedness. As we take up to-day the memorials of that Passion and that Death, shall we not be ashamed of our easy thoughts of life? Let us enter the fellowship of His sufferings, endue ourselves with His sense of the awful difficulty of doing the Father's will, and while we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, refuse to be selfishly content with that and take up our share of the world's burdens and sorrows. So He restoreth our souls.

Some, at an opposite extreme, may be wearied. It may seem to some hardly worth while trying to be pure, or continuing to be patient. Some may be bitter because men misunderstand or thwart them, in endeavours which they know to be in accordance with God's will. O what restoration it is to *consider Him that endured such contradic-*

tion of sinners against Himself! We *have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin.*

So it is, brethren. Whether it be the joy of the world and its praise, or weariness and opposition, which stifle conscience and tamper with the will: it is but a look at our Lord, and He restoreth our soul; gives us no magic or arbitrary grace, but the natural infection of His own heroism, the natural sympathy of His own sufferings, and the most moral of all gifts, a quick conscience and a tender heart.

III

But the restoration of the soul which Christ begins in us by forgiveness, and the faith that we are the children of God; and which He makes so keen and quick by the example of His obedience and service—this restoration, He tells us, is perfected only through self-sacrifice. That is a discipline which has always been ready to suggest itself. Most moral systems inculcate it; and there never was a man in whose heart, however obscure or ignorant, the thought of it did not arise as a resource in danger or as compensation for sin. It has been preached by religion as penance; and

many a man feeling the world to be intrinsically bad, or his own body very evil, has forsaken the one or mutilated the other. But to Jesus self-sacrifice was never a penalty or a narrower life. It was a glory and a greater life. He called men to it not of fear, nor for the purpose of appeasing the deity, or of having their sins forgiven; but in freedom and for love's sake. He urged it not that men might save a miserable remnant of life by resigning the rest, but that through self-denial they might enter a larger conception of life, and a deeper enjoyment of their possibilities as sons of God. *He that findeth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life shall find it.*

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and come after me. What does Christ mean by the cross which every disciple must bear? Some have no choice in the matter. Physical circumstances, or the conduct of their friends, has made it impossible for them to do anything but resign the gratification of natural instincts and hopes which other men may innocently enjoy, and with the appetite for which they themselves have been born. God has laid upon them ill-health or disease. The carelessness,

the cruelty, or the vice of those dear to them has torn their heart, or shackled their powers, or cut down their opportunities. Others have a burden of work greater than they are able to bear, and very distasteful: it means the loss of some innocent happiness, the denial of appetites which it seemed their life to satisfy. But none of these can be a man's cross till he himself take it up in the faith that it is from God's hands, in submission to the Father's will—and it may be—in love for some fellow-man, for whose betterment it is to be borne. The sacrifices of God are not our sufferings in themselves: the sacrifices of God are, as the Psalm says, our contrite hearts and submissive wills: our resolute purpose to love and help even those who may deserve nothing from us.

Others again have their cross to seek. There may be such here. It is easy for some, as the children of many Christian generations, to keep the commandments: and in their pure environments they feel no need of struggle to do good. Friends, Christ met one of your kind in the rich young ruler, and he asked of him therefore all the greater sacrifice. That ease of virtue, and shelter from temptation may be only the preparation for

a supreme duty of self-denial. Watch for it, ask for it. *What must I do to inherit eternal life?*

Others may have found the outward circumstance and fortune of life so kind, that they have never known the need of self-denial in anything. But such an estate is full of peril. To know no self-denial in life is to be out of touch with reality. It is to be without the only test whereby we may prove whether our virtue and our faith are not a dream. We *must* obstinately question ourselves, and resolutely cultivate opportunities of a larger knowledge of the unhappy world around us.

But above all we must come into contact with Christ. We must haunt His Cross. We must infect ourselves, as we can to-day while using these symbols of His Sacrifice, with His Passion and His Love for men.

XV

SERMON BEFORE COMMUNION. II

He took bread.—Luke xii. 19.

I WISH to speak of the bearing of this Sacrament upon our common life.

There are many persons, who, whether from their infrequent communions or from some ancient superstition that still lingers, have formed the habit of lifting the Lord's Supper out of connection with their everyday life. It is right that we should regard the memorial of facts so divine with more than usual seriousness of feeling, and that we should prepare for it with a very earnest discipline. But how many, who do this with all honesty as the feast comes round, fail to carry away from it any influence for the rest of their lives? Are we not all tempted to treat the Sacrament as a special and occasional means of grace, which demands from

us at the time unusual adoration and effort to purify our hearts, but which has no practical effect upon the intervals of life between its celebrations.

Very different was the intention of Christ Himself in instituting this sacrament. It is true that what He embodied in it were the highest and most awful mysteries of His Gospel—His wonderful Incarnation and His mysterious Atonement on the Cross. When we remember that it is to nothing less than these we draw near in this Sacrament—these which were prepared from all eternity, and accomplished by God Himself for our salvation—it behoves us to approach with very deep feelings of worship, and with a strenuous putting away of sin from our hearts. We remember to-day the *Word of God made flesh.* We *behold the Lamb of God that beareth the sin of the world.* But while it is these unique and awful events which Christ brings us to celebrate in the Sacrament, He brings them near to us, not in signs of the glory and the terror in which they were enacted, but in signs which express their common and daily usefulness to our lives. *He took bread*, and *He took wine.* That is to say, He chose two materials of daily use to be the symbols of the central facts of our salvation—

two materials which man employs for his common and regular nourishment. Could He have made it more plain that He intended the Sacrament to be not only the memorial of His Incarnation and Atonement, which we should adore in penitence and in faith, but to be the means of applying both of these saving facts in the constant and ordinary nourishment of our souls? He shows that these unique events, His life and death, are to take their full effect just in the way our daily bread and wine take effect, as the sustenance and strength of our working lives. If anything were wanting in the Sacrament itself to make clear that His purpose was of this practical kind, it was surely supplied by His action after supper, when He took a towel and girt Himself, and washed His disciples' feet. When you are tempted, as we are all tempted, to let the meaning of the Sacrament exhaust itself in the clear Gospel it proclaims at intervals, or in the solemn feelings which it stirs, recall these plain actions of Christ—*He took bread, He took the cup, He took a towel.* Christ, before all, would be practical; would bring these awful mysteries into the most intimate and useful connection with our lives. It is not merely the

devotion of your heart, roused to an unusual degree by more than usually sacred associations; it is not the temporary increase of your faith and love, which He wants to-day. He wants your common life, in its sin, its hunger and its duties, that He may show you how His grace is its daily food, and how His example is its highest standard.

I am the bread of life, He says as He hands us this bread. The bread of life does not mean what will stimulate us to a more than ordinary strength of devotion to Him—a strength which is only to diminish again towards another communion. The bread of life is the bread we are to live by to-morrow and the next day and all the next; the bread in the strength of which we are to get through our business, resist temptation, grow strong in character, rich in enthusiasm, steadfast in will.

How many of us have no idea what Christ means by being the Bread of Life, simply because we have not first of all asked ourselves what we wish life itself to be! If life be for us, what it is for so many, something out of which is shut not only what is God-like, but even the higher human affections—in which aspirations after truth and

purity are regarded as impossible, and aspirations after unselfishness as misleading—in which we take no more interest in our fellows than our curiosity or our avarice excites—in which we cannot know God as our Father, because we fear Him only as the incalculable force that may disappoint our selfish hopes—in which we cannot know our fellow-men as brethren, because we only recognise them as our rivals for the good things and the snug places of the world,—then we have no need of Christ, and His offer of Himself as the Bread of our lives will fall meaningless on our ears. But if life for us be otherwise: if we choose to see life in its largest meanings, and lay upon our hearts its real responsibilities; if life be to us the power to grow away from sin, to stand through temptation and to wear down adversity; if it be the recovery of failure, and the healing of wounds, and the courage against death; if still higher, we have known that we come from the Father, who has made His image our ideal, and our destiny the perfect performance of His will; if we feel how far we are from that image, and how terribly difficult that will is to do,—I say, if life be such a liberty, and such a hope, and such an agony,

then Christ alone is the strength of our life. He will not fail us in any of its wants and struggles; but he that cometh to Him shall never hunger, and he that believeth in Him shall never thirst.

Bring then your common life, and let its atmosphere be about us to-day. Do not let any artificial sanctity possess us. Do not let us try to be something to-day that we know we will not be to-morrow. Let us not affect what we cannot keep up after we cross this threshold and get among our temptations again. There is nothing that Satan uses so fatally to wrap up a man's conscience in as communion affectations. Let the men and women who lift their hearts here to-day be the men and women of to-morrow, as they face their work, their daily ideals, their daily temptations—as they deal with their employers and servants—as they feel the duty and the strain of life. It is not people with the few conventional religious aspirations for whom this sacrament is meant; it is men and women with the strain, the hunger and the pity of their common life upon them.

Now, that we may get our common life about us, let us recall three of its main wants—its want

of struggle against sin, its want of love, its want of consecration—and see how this Sacrament meets these.

I

This Sacrament tells us first and foremost of a struggle against sin. We are asked indeed to enjoy the results of that struggle—the forgiveness and the grace that it won for us; bread of strength, and wine of pardon. But we are not allowed to forget how our sin was removed—what it cost our Lord in battle and in death. The bread is broken, the wine poured forth, in memory that our sin brought Him to the Cross—that He gave Himself to crucifixion for our guilt. The sight of this—that sin was met and overcome by sufferings and a contest so terrible—is enough of itself to beget in us a hatred for even the sweetest of our evil habits. But there is more than that here. There is more than the vision of how awful a conflict was endured for us by One who had no other need to enter it than the great love He bare us. There is the call to enter upon struggle ourselves. There is the reminder that sin can be destroyed only by strenu-

ous means. There is the warning that our daily commonplace sins need to be dealt with in the same earnestness and agony. There is the reminder which Paul states in just so many words, that as Christ was crucified *for* us, so we have to be crucified *with* Him—so we have to crucify our sinful nature, breaking free from all that is strongest upon us, killing all that is most dear to us, so be it is against the holy will of God.

Now, have we done this? When we are brought face to face with the Cross—with its rigours, its pains, and its death—do we not feel utterly ashamed of the easy conscience we hold towards our sins, and the half-measures we have used to get rid of them? How reproachfully do these elements address our common life: *Ye have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin!* Is it not so? You know how, even when we begin to feel uneasy about any sin, we shrink from facing its full results and our full duty with regard to it. You know how often when we repent of a sin, our repentance is all gone before its next attack, and we meet it with a light heart in which no sense of hostility to it is stirring. You know how apt we are to feel about our sins, that they will die of old

age. You know, young men, how you think this of certain sins, that they will leave you as respectable and staid as your middle-aged fathers. You know, men of middle age, how you think of certain bad tempers and compromises with the ways of the world, that they are only due to the strife of business, and that they will disappear when business is over and God grants you a few years of retirement to prepare for heaven. But no sin dies of old age, and "no sin dies of half-measures." The Cross, in these memorials of what happened upon it, reminds us that what sin needs is killing—crucifixion. Sin may not die at once; it may keep you fighting to kill it for a lifetime; but it is only when your heart is wholly committed against it, is wholly bent upon its destruction, that increasing victory will be granted you, and you will be spared the awful shame of passing from life without having overcome.

Do not then, I beseech you, take away only the pardon that this Sacrament offers and seals to you; take also the new conscience—the knowledge that this is the only way sin can be dealt with, and the resolution so to deal with it. Do not do what so many do so often—bewail at Communion only your

coldness of feeling and meagreness of faith. Mention your besetting sins—any unkind temper you have, any shady way of doing business, any unholy desires; and, by the Passion and the Cross of Him who died that sin might be destroyed, resolve to fight them to the bitter end.

II

I think, if we bring our common life up to this Sacrament, we shall feel our want of love. *God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* That grace, that self-sacrifice, that heroism—may God's Spirit loosen our wonder and our affection upon them to-day! May we really be stirred by the thought of our Father's mercy; of our elder Brother's perfect love to us! May we take new heart in our despondency and our poor struggles after scanctification! He who hath so loved us will not leave us alone, but will love us to the end past sorrow, past sin and past death.

Let us feel all this to the uttermost; but in any rapture it inspires do not let us fail to compare with

it our own temper and conduct. There is here not only grace for us; there is example—example and a divine infection. And the grace cannot be truly won unless the example and the infection of it are also felt.

For we must not think that this love is beyond our imitation; that there is here an instance of heroism and self-sacrifice which only a very few, and these at a great distance, are called to repeat in their own lives. In most lives, it is true, the opportunities to heroic sacrifice are very rare. "But there is a harder, a braver, a better thing than heroic action —namely, the power of the Cross in little, common things." The most sublime fact which could happen to-day—the fact which would more change and illuminate the world than anything else—would be the lighting up of millions of average Christian lives with the spirit of the Cross. It is not the emergence of a man here and there from the crowd into a brilliant heroism that the world needs. It is the shedding abroad of tenderness, pity, and the cheer and sympathy which come from self-forgetfulness. It is the shedding abroad of the dew and lustre of all that upon all the

unattractive characters of respectable religious people. Therefore to-day let us not ask from God or seek from the Cross an enthusiasm for something great when it ought to be the harshness or the meanness of our daily tempers which we seek His love to drive forth from us. Ask from Christ the spirit of the Cross for our daily life—habitual patience, self-restraint, self-forgetfulness, charity, and tenderness for others.

III

The third want of our life is the want of consecration. If we have sensitive consciences to-day, two things must be troubling us. *First*, our little influence for good in the world; and, *secondly*, the number of vulgar and base temptations which assail us from day to day—not great, clean temptations, in which, as in Christ's, we feel God's Spirit testing us for discipline, but the occupation of our minds by sordid things, the irritation of our hearts by trifling worries, the suggestion of things base—all the kind of things we feel we ought to be above if we are God's true children.

Both of these experiences betray the same want

—the want of consecration. We have not shown any difference from the world, we have not got on with our work, we have not been free from the baser temptations, just in proportion as our consecration has been partial and insincere. Here we receive a new opportunity. In the presence of our Master's perfect sacrifice, by the symbols of His passion and His death, we are called to give ourselves once more to God. May the faithfulness, the utterness of Christ's devotion come down on us! May His love consume in us all that is dishonourable, break the bands that bind us to sin, engage every one of our faculties and affections, and bring us with every talent we possess and every opportunity to the service of God and His kingdom! There could be no greater miracle in any town than that which would follow from the full devotion of a whole congregation to Christ around His Table. May every one of us be moved to-day by these mercies of God—so apparent, so urgent—to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.